

Scotpress



# ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES

a Star Trek  
fanzine

70



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Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 70.

As this is the first Log Entries of 1986, we'd like to take the chance to pass on to you all our best wishes for the year.

Part of the delay with this issue is that we have been busy preparing the two issues of Enterprise Incidents containing stories by Jennifer Guttridge. Reaction to the first of these is very encouraging, and it is good to see a new generation of readers enjoying stories by one of the classic writers in fandom.

It is no exaggeration to speak of a new generation of fans, because of course 1986 sees the twentieth anniversary of Star Trek. Some of you reading this now were not even born when the Enterprise first appeared on the television screens of America.

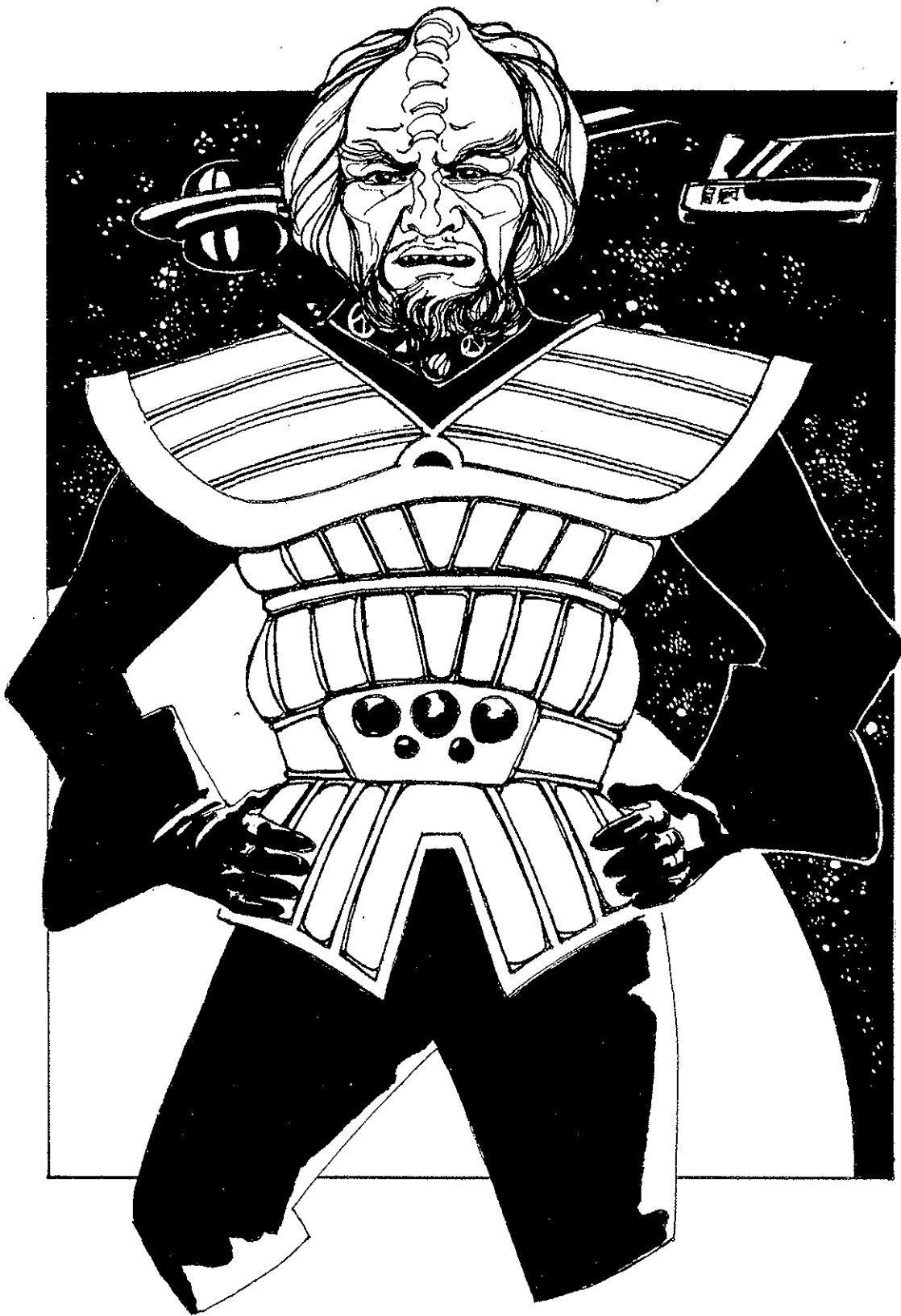
You could even say our contributors this issue reflect the survival and growth of fandom. Linda Bryant, Susan Keighley, CarolMel Ambassador, Wendy Montgomery and Synda Surgenor make their first appearance in Log Entries, while Vicki Richards, Karen Hayden and Ann Humphrey are long-standing and valued friends. To them and all our other contributors, our thanks.

Speaking of contributors, we always welcome submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork. We are looking for series-based action/adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are welcomed, but even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

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# THE CAPTAIN'S BOLT

by

Linda Bryant

Captain Kirk looked round the bridge from the command chair. His gaze was on the mid distance, but his hazel eyes flashed a delighted response to the gleam of an idea. The Enterprise was in orbit around Terra, and he had just visualised the effect of a holographed Loch Ness Monster undulating down the centre of the officers' table just as Scotty, as Master of Ceremonies, introduced the crew to tomorrow's officers' entertainment...

Kirk caught himself, and surreptitiously glanced round to see if anyone had noticed. Uhura returned his half smile, and he got a nod from Spock at the science console.

Uhura reminded him of a scheduled call from Faslane Underwater Science Station, and Kirk took the call from Captain McLean. The Enterprise was scheduled to pick up a batch of a new proton bolt weapon developed by the station and to run deep space tests on it while returning for a dry docking on Academy.

"Mr. Spock, take the Galileo with Mr. Sulu and Mr. Chekov to collect the bolts and attend for formal briefing."

Spock computed the coordinates, and then reported, "If we leave in 26.3 minutes we will have a window to rejoin the Enterprise in 2 hours, 52.86 minutes."

Uhura reopened the link to Captain McLean, Kirk confirmed the time parameters for briefing and loading, and the three officers left for the shuttle bay.

Sulu expertly guided the Galileo over a narrow channel of deep water and in to land. Captain McLean hurried from his aircar to welcome them.

"Commander Spock, Helmsman Sulu, Weapons Officer Chekov, welcome to Faslane."

They rode in the aircar to the complex. Captain McLean ushered them into a large foyer. Sulu and Chekov stopped in their tracks, and even Spock broke step. In the foyer was U 252, a small, 300 year old diesel-engined submarine, its grey painted metal hull streamlined beauty and function, in fundamental design uncompromising in the 23rd century.

"It's..."

"Wow! "

"Captain Kirk should see this."

"May I take a tricorder record of this, Captain Mclean?"

Captain Mclean nodded assent at the three officers as he responded to their enthusiasm. "U 252 is completely functional, with all the original fittings, fixtures and weapons. In addition we have fitted her up as a holovideo environment unit. Would you like to run some of the programmes? I will have to do a final charge safety check on the batch of bolts, and I will see them loaded onto the shuttle, then we can meet for coffee and I'll go through the briefing tapes with you."

Spock frowned.

"Commander, it's within the scope of your orders. I just needed your shuttle to carry the load to the Enterprise."

The Enterprise officers climbed the gantry and entered the conning tower. Sulu's head was flung back, Chekov's eyes had a light of dedication in them and Spock's hands rested briefly on the rim, for U 252 had come alive and was wallowing gently on an unseen sea as they boarded her. A vertical ladder led into the tubular interior. Open plan ducting filled the tube except at the base, where a removable grid formed the floor.

Spock found the holovision environmental programme controls and began loading them into his tricorder as the three officers sat sideways to the bridge area in the cramped submarine officers quarters. Then the Vulcan activated the controls and the holovisioned Captain, planesman and radio officer came into view. From above them the First Lieutenant and lookouts conned U 252 out into the Atlantic of 1941. The motion got more choppy and occasionally spray mixed with the smell of diesel and unusual noise and vibration of internal combustion engine propulsion.

The bridge lighting changed to battle red and a klaxon shouted its bone-jarring warning.

"Prepare to dive!"

Spock wished the sensations were not so all-pervading, making analysis difficult, but Sulu and Chekov were entranced. A downward tilt, increasing, a lurch as the clutch was disengaged. The change to battery power eased the volume of noise but the pressure on the ears increased with the change in depth and brought awareness of the sea and the stresses and strains on the fabric of the submarine.

Sulu used his tricorder to capture on tape the situation briefing, condition and battle readiness, and linked Spock's tricorder into the battle sequences. Chekov's eyes shone. He did not want to miss a 'battle' in this historical craft.

U 252 was at periscope depth, her Captain at the periscope, First Lieutenant at the 'fruit machine' - an early mechanical computer - and the radio operator was quartering with his valve set. The submarine was taken through a series of tactical manoeuvres by the planesman and engineer to get into position for torpedo firing.

"Bow torpedo, Fire 1," the holocaptain commanded, and the jolt and percussion were felt throughout the submarine as the pressure equalised.

"Fire 2!" repeated the manoeuvre.

"Green 142, degrees Fire 4; 158 degrees, Fire 6. Steady 165 degrees, Fire 3; 172 degrees, Fire 5; 185 degrees heading as you are, full power for three minutes."

Sulu's hands tightened in his lap as U 252 corkscrewed, then passed beneath the enemy ships.

"Take us down to 200 feet, blow Q."

The blasts of sound, the vibrations and motions of the next few minutes were similar to re-entry through a tough barrier.

The tape did not finish even there. "Shut off for depth, charging!" shouted the Captain, and throughout the submarine watertight bulkheads closed off. The atmosphere became full of condensation, the smell of fear, bilges and chlorine, and then a barrage of sensory and harmonic cataclysms beyond their experience. Sulu and Chekov both lost control and were screaming at the noise, but for the Vulcan it was far worse, and he lost consciousness for a moment.

The tape finished and normal air conditioning and lighting were restored. Sulu pressed his ears in an attempt to stop them ringing and with a conscious effort at control carefully closed his mouth. Chekov finally took a breath and turned a sweat-drenched face to Sulu. Both muttered that now was the time for coffee.

Spock stayed behind to disconnect the tricorders. He then moved slowly and cautiously to the rest rooms in the foyer where, unobserved, he was quietly sick and spent a difficult few minutes regaining control.

In the briefing room the Enterprise officers accepted the package of tapes offered, each still in a haze of reaction to U 252, and left to await take-off in the haven of the Galileo.

Sulu docked the Galileo in the Enterprise's shuttle bay and Chekov supervised the unloading of the batch of bolts. Spock took the tapes and reported to the bridge.

Kirk gave him a sharp look. Spock clasped his hands behind his back and said, low-voiced,

"Captain, I have had an unusual experience at Faslane, and my ears still seem to be affected. I do not think it is permanent, but I request permission to report to sickbay before resuming duty."

Before Kirk could respond Sulu and Chekov erupted onto the bridge.

"Keptin!"

"Fantastic holoenvironment!"

"What an experience!"

Kirk dismissed Spock to sickbay, his eyes saying 'see me later',

and listened as Sulu and Chekov told him about U 252.

"I would have liked to have seen that."

Chekov and Sulu grinned at each other and appropriated Spock's tricorder, both thinking, *Wait!* If they worked at it, tomorrow's officers' entertainment would be memorable to all.

In sickbay Spock was stiffly reporting his reaction to the sound, vision and motion of the U 252 tapes, and admitted he still suffered some deafness and nausea.

McCoy checked him carefully, referred to some basic medicine tapes, and reassured Spock there would be no permanent damage; he just needed a few hours rest and quiet.

"And that's an order, Spock."

Spock's eyebrow rose.

McCoy looked at him and asked softly, "Don't you know what it was, Spock?"

"It was a fascinating and excellent environmental holovision."

"Not *that*, Spock." McCoy's mirth overcame him. "You poor, green, pointy-eared elf, you were seasick!"

"Doctor, I do not find this a subject for mirth. I concur - I was seasick. But you see, we do not *have* seas on Vulcan."

Mr. Scott was busy setting some of the bolts in their hold and firing pods in the weapons bay. For once he had no grumbles. The bolts were finely made and fitted the pods - the bairns were of guid design. He reflected a moment, considering the morning's work. Sometimes a piece of machinery proclaimed its integrity of design and function. Scott contemplated Chekov's report of collecting these bairns, and what he would need of engineering section to complete the environmental holovision for the officers' entertainment, and scuttlebutt had it that even Spock had reacted.

Kirk linked bridge to engineering; he wanted to get the bolts test out of the way and clear his desk.

"Mr. Scott, report."

"Installation complete and checked out. Ye can tell yon Russian devil we are ready for firing."

The turbolift deposited Spock onto the bridge, and he went to the science computer. His relief indicated on the monitors the weapons tape from Faslane.

"Mr. Spock?"

Kirk waited. Spock took control, and after a moment reported,



"Weapons link test firing sequence locked on ready."

"Uhura?"

"Deep space clear for 25 parsecs, Captain. All hailing frequencies open."

"Mr. Sulu, take us on this heading. Fire Drone."

"Mr. Chekov, initiate firing sequence on your mark."

With an almost identical bracing of shoulders and flexible bending forward motion U 252-style by Sulu and Chekov, caught with a raised eyebrow by Spock and a mystified look from Kirk and Uhura, the officers went to work.

Kirk watched the drone drift away on the viewscreen. A beam of almost visible energy shot away from the Enterprise. Sulu's eyes widened as he almost felt a response through the helm; Uhura and Chekov almost heard the firing; Spock felt an odd disorientation, almost nausea; Kirk's eyes narrowed.

Subliminal as the bridge officers' responses had been, all tensed. Kirk pushed the command override button.

"Hold!" Chekov shouted.

The first proton bolt closed on the drone; it reared up the drone, spun and returned.

"Sulu, evasive action at will."

The Enterprise was caught in her own turbulence as she wheeled and jumped across space. The motion was too much for Spock; he slumped over his console, unconscious. The spinning bolt followed the path torn by its own passing and into the Enterprise's wake.

"Cut our wake!" Kirk shouted. "Shields up!"

Sulu banked them into a tight turn, completing the circle and cutting their wake.

"Brace!" shouted Kirk.

The first proton bolt hit the Enterprise's shields and detonated in a burst of light; the bridge shuddered as the sound imploded.

Spock was stirring but not yet conscious at his console. Uhura moved to help him. Chekov was reporting his tracking.

"Bolts 2 and 3 flung off course and detonated, Captain."

"Uhura, have damage reports sent to the bridge, please."

The Enterprise was in a safe passage away from the Sol system. Luckily the proton bolt had not caused any damage, just fireworks. Kirk had called a meeting of his officers in the briefing room.

"What the hell happened there?" he demanded.

Spock keyed in the computer. "The proton bolt consists of a

small matter/antimatter engine held by an electrically generated magnetic field. The firing charge propels the bolt in the set trajectory; the electric field is distorted on contact with the target and the matter/antimatter engine self destructs. The charges were not dissipated on contact with our drone and the mathematics of spin resonance demanded that it followed its course back."

Kirk was astounded.

Smoothly, well aware that the question he was answering was not the one Kirk had really wanted to ask, Spock continued,

"The problem is only one of calibration of bolt charge and mass in deep space. I will set it up in the firing sequence on the computer."

Kirk put in, "Mr. Spock, we damn nearly shot ourselves out of space there."

Spock's voice softened. "The bolts were not set high enough to damage the Enterprise, but I would recommend using the shuttle for the experimental series of tests."

Captain Kirk handed over the con to Mr. Scott, who would run through the checks on the shuttle and bolts for Spock's test runs. Uhura had asked for permission to go off duty and prepare her music for the officers' entertainment. Sulu and Chekov were in the main recreational level running the U 252 programmes. Occasionally they would buzz Spock with a query. Spock was just finishing his programme for the bolt tests.

The bridge was peaceful. Kirk was not. Spock looked up as Kirk passed on his way to the turbolift.

"I will finish this in 3.6 minutes, Captain. As we are off duty, would you like to practice K'assumi?"

Kirk agreed eagerly, although he still felt restless and depressed.

Kirk and Spock changed and went into a small gym set up with a do-jo. They exchanged the formal hand to shoulder greetings of K'assumi and began the workout.

Making contact during warming up exercises, Kirk was pleased to feel he was working up to a fighting level. A gentle blow from Spock brought his attention back and he grinned, giving himself to the ancient warrior techniques of unarmed combat. They worked through the routine, Spock leading but extending Kirk to his limits. Kirk set his mind in K'assumi and he was really fighting, pushing high kicks. Kirk leapt, Spock faltered, and unable to pull back the kick fully, Kirk caught Spock high on the side of his jaw by the ear. Spock slumped and was still. Kirk dropped down, but realising he had knocked Spock out, moved to the intercom and called for sickbay.

"Bones, I've knocked Spock out in rec-room 4."

Spock moved slightly and Kirk went to hold him still, one hand pushing Spock's shoulders to the floor while the other checked the area he had hit, his fingers bridging between the hollow of cheek and eyebrow.

Kirk was still holding that position when McCoy burst in, demanding to know when, where and how. Spock opened his eyes as Kirk released him. He looked at Kirk and McCoy.

"Captain, you knocked me out? No, Doctor, there is nothing wrong with me now. I know - I have been knocked out before." He let his eyes rest on Kirk, puzzled. "Not by the Captain, though."

McCoy broke in, "Spock, you were out long enough for Jim to call me, and I insist no more now. Rest until this evening."

"Doctor, I am recovered. However, it is my time to meditate so I will change now and meet you both later this evening."

McCoy watched him leave, then looked at Kirk. "He was okay when I came in. He's tough - don't worry. You have just discovered one way of relaxing a Vulcan."

Kirk changed and wandered back to the bridge to relieve Scott. During the watch in a quiet moment Uhura came to ask him if he had any requests for her to play. Kirk thought for a moment, then smiled.

"You know how to fit into the mood of the crew better than I, but..." on impulse, "... play something especially for Spock, please."

Uhura's eyebrows shot up in a fair Vulcan imitation. "I was going to, Captain. I had noticed he seems..." she hesitated, "less... Vulcan? I wondered what you have been doing to him."

Kirk leaned forward, knowing that scuttlebutt would have got here. "I knocked him out in the gym," he quipped. "He was napping anyway."

Kirk stopped by Spock's quarters. He signalled on the buzzer and the door slid open. Spock, in full dress uniform, was lying on the bed looking more relaxed than he had for some time.

"Fine. I am ready," he responded, an eyebrow up, to Kirk's unvoiced query. Together they went to the main recreational level.

Uhura, unable to resist the pure mischief in his eyes, nodded and went to her instrument.

Uhura gave them the introduction. Both men touched opposite shoulders in the challenge given and accepted. His eyes on Spock, Kirk mouthed, "Trust me, please," and led easily into their warm-up routine.

Uhura played, watching them. The crew, still tense from U 252's battle, relaxed as they sensed this was to be different.

Kirk and Spock mirrored each other. Sometimes Kirk followed the major key, sometimes the minor; sometimes he led, sometimes he followed, until the final movement. As the music rose to its climax they linked hands, back to back, touched heads and heels, and braced

out. It was difficult to follow the next move. Spock lowered his arms and flung Kirk into a somersault. Kirk landed with his feet on Spock's, his hands linking Spock's wrists and his head cradled beneath Spock's chin. They held the pose for a moment, the mirror images finally one, broke, bowed to the audience and to Uhura. The applause was soft at first, but as the spell broke it became tumultuous.

Uhura began playing again as the light dimmed. Sensing the mood of the crew she started by singing some of her lullabies, moving effortlessly into the songs of childhood, innocence and wonder, to the current popular songs the crew would join in singing. Finally she played the Enterprise's own anthem. The lights came on, and in twos and threes the crew dispersed.

Kirk looked round for Mr. Scott, who had the next watch. "Ah, Scotty. All set for tomorrow?"

"I'll just check the Galileo's engine and recheck the charges on yon bolts." A frown passed over his face.

"No doubts?" Kirk asked.

"Well, ye ken that I'm dependant on Spock's calculations, even if he is a walking computer."

McCoy snorted. "I'm going to check that sickbay is ready for all eventualities," he remarked darkly.

Kirk grinned at the familiar banter and walked to his quarters with Spock.

Spock said diffidently, "Jim, would you like to come in and have some refreshment? I will take a drink before retiring."

"Thanks, Spock."

Kirk went to the processor and dialled a coffee and a fruit juice. Spock was sitting on his bunk. The Captain passed him his drink and sat down facing him.

"Tired, Spock?" he asked softly.

"Somewhat fatigued."

Kirk gave him a sharp glance. Spock rarely admitted anything personal.

"Any reservations about tomorrow's tests with the shuttle?"

"None."

They sat in companionable silence. Kirk wanted to ask how Spock felt about tonight's Officers Entertainment, but could not find an acceptable way to phrase his question so the Vulcan would be able to answer it. He was a fraction slow in noticing Spock's reaction. Startled, he looked up to find Spock rigid on the edge of his bunk.

"Jim, leave me now, please." Spock's tone was strained, and he dived to the fresher unit.



Kirk hesitated. Obviously whatever was wrong demanded privacy for the Vulcan, but it was too late. It was embarrassing to stay, but far worse to go. He gave Spock a few uncomfortable minutes before moving to the fresher door and calling gently,

"Spock? Spock, I'm still here. Are you all right? Spock, please tell me what's wrong. Shall I get Bones? Answer me, or I'll come in."

There was no reply and Kirk cursed. Hell, Vulcan privacy or not, he couldn't just leave! He pulled the door open to find Spock, barely conscious, slumped against the wall. As he touched him a tinge of green suffused his face. His eyes implored Kirk, who met them.

"Come on, my friend. Let me help you."

Kirk grabbed a towel and, supporting Spock, led him to and gently eased him onto his bunk.

"Lie there while I get Bones."

"No need, Jim. I am recovered now."

Kirk ignored the comment. He moved to the intercom and called McCoy. "Bones, can you come to Spock's quarters, and bring your medical kit."

"Spock?"

"Yes."

Kirk went back to Spock. The Vulcan had pulled the covers over himself and was lying on his back. He refused to acknowledge the Human's presence.

Kirk stood watching him, uncertain what to do. The cabin buzzer sounded, and he went to let McCoy in.

"Do you want me to go, Spock?"

Spock's eyes signalled, 'No' as McCoy bustled to the bunk, medicorder set for Spock in hand.

"What's been going on then, Spock? Jim, you haven't been knocking him about again?"

Kirk moved away as McCoy checked Spock out, offering him a mild sedative but unsurprised when it was refused.

"My body will heal itself."

"Spock, do you know what caused this? It's happened before, hasn't it?"

"Unknown, and yes. I had just taken a drink. Normally I would not drink anything until rising. However, if I am left alone time will heal me. I shall sleep now."

McCoy was still puzzled, but his medicorder showed Spock to be within normal limits and sleepy, so he contented himself with, "Okay, we'll leave you now, but I'll require you in sickbay tomorrow for a check before you go on duty."

Spock agreed, and the Humans left him to sleep.

McCoy followed Kirk into his cabin and accepted a drink. "What happened, Jim?"

"Some sort of seizure after he had a drink, I think."

"Vulcans don't get upset stomachs, Jim."

"He is only half Vulcan, and I think he was more shocked than anything. Bones, was it connected with my knocking him out?"

"Possibly, but he is basically sound, and only in mild shock. I hate to admit it, but he does know his own physiology better than I do."

Kirk grinned and, changing the subject, said reflectively, "We were good, weren't we?"

"Jim, be careful with Spock, will you?"

Kirk looked his question.

"That entertainment meant a lot to you. It's an emotional expression from you to the crew. Yes, and tonight's performance was inspired. But you have pulled Spock into it, and he is not built that way."

Secretly appalled by McCoy's implication, Kirk exclaimed defensively, "Bones, you're always saying he needs to react more emotionally, that he is half Human." Then, suddenly horrified by his own self awareness, "Do you think I am responsible for him being off colour?"

"I'm not sure. Overall, no, but he has been in a state of mild shock for the last few days. I believe he will come to terms with whatever is bothering him in his own time and way. You don't realise the control you exert over him, so hold back a little, eh?"

Chastised and thoughtful, Kirk returned to the bridge.

Captain Kirk had the con. The turbolift hissed as Spock left the bridge for the shuttle bay. Uhura set up communications with the Galileo, and Scott's voice came over the intercom.

"All systems ready for takeoff, Captain."

Kirk gave permission and the Galileo took off in independent flight.

Sulu released the drone and checked the Galileo's course coordinates with Spock, and then moved the Enterprise out of the way to hover as the shuttle made her firing run. Chekov at the weapons console checked his monitor tapes with Mr. Scott in the Galileo.

In the shuttle Spock as pilot and Scott as navigator completed the checks and switched to computer control for the bolts test.

"Ready, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir."

"Commencing run, at your mark now."

Scott activated the firing console.

He was not sure when he noticed something was wrong. Spock seemed to hunch as the computer chimed, "Firing 1," and Scott was aware of a blurring at the edge of his vision.

"Firing 2. Firing 3."

Suddenly Scott's visual field narrowed and pain filled his head. It felt as if his brain was being squeezed.

"Firing 4. Firing 5."

Scott's vision turned red, then... blackness. He tried to move, to speak, to alert the Enterprise or start the manual override, but he could not do it.

On the Enterprise, Chekov followed the run. "All systems close to 100% prediction. Brilliant, Captain! Captain?"

Captain Kirk had been watching the run on the viewscreen. He knew Spock would override the computer and pull out of the run manually, for although the computer could fly the Galileo more accurately, Spock never missed a chance at piloting free flight himself.

The Galileo wheeled precisely out of the run - and it was *wrong*!

Ingrained in the very fibre of his being was Kirk's certainty in his hunches. His mind, his senses, his instincts, his emotions were all meshed and finely tuned, so often enabling him to make the right decision effortlessly. He did not hesitate now, but pushed the abort button.

"Sulu! Switch shuttle to automatic override, Code 1. Chekov, set tractor beams onto the shuttle. Engineering, Shuttle Bay, Emergency Code 3. Prepare for return of disabled shuttle. Sickbay, medical rescue team, Priority 1, Code 2 to Shuttle Bay."

The Galileo came in on automatic con and was caught by the tractor beams and docked in the shuttle bay. The airlock was automatically released and Dr. McCoy and two stretcher teams entered the Galileo.

Scott appeared first, obviously shaken. "Tell the Captain... check the bolts for ultrasonic resonance."

McCoy grabbed him and checked him out. "Hmm, you could be right. Arterial constriction similar to high unshielded G force." He set his hypospray. "That should do you, along with 24 hours rest. Off you go to sickbay - I want to keep an eye on you."

A stretcher party brought Spock out on an anti-grav stretcher. McCoy checked him over, puzzled.

"Get him to sickbay where I can use a brain scan."

Kirk entered McCoy's office impatiently. "How are they?"

"Scotty's okay. Got off with just a shaking - he just needs rest. Spock... I don't know. I can't find any damage, but he is in shock and a trance-like level beneath consciousness which I can't pull him out of. I wish we were closer to Vulcan, for it has all the characteristics of a deep mind meld. I think his brain has stuck at that level as a protection against deeper damage."

McCoy considered for a moment. "Jim, you've been in a meld with Spock, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Could you initiate a meld with Spock?"

"No way."

"Are you sure?"

"Bones, you don't know what it's like. It's a strain on Spock to meld with an alien mind, and he is trained and knows what he's doing. I was willing, but I didn't do anything."

"Jim, I need to know. Can you describe what happens?"

Kirk's eyes widened and he looked at the doctor. "I've only melded with Spock at his instigation and choice - mine too - but I have always accepted only that which he offers. I have been passive. He has always led the meld, and only at a level that lets me communicate things I will talk about with you, but cannot say to him - except at mind level." He looked shyly at McCoy. "I would not push or pry in any way. Hell, Bones, that would be rape of a special trust."

"Think, Jim. You obviously *did* respond. How?"

Unconsciously, Kirk had pushed his fingers into the meld contact position and closed his eyes. He concentrated, thinking inwardly. There was a pathway he could follow...

McCoy watched him intently. "Jim," he said gently, "Over the last few days I've seen you do that with Spock. Are you sure you can't initiate a link with him?" he prodded. "Do you remember calling me to the gym? You said Spock was unconscious. Well, he wasn't when I came in, and I definitely disturbed something. Spock has been acting uncharacteristically for the last few days." He shook Kirk. "Didn't you realise?"

Shamefaced, Kirk said, "Yes... No... I pushed it to the back of my mind until I had time to consider what it means."

McCoy said flatly, "Jim, come on. You've got to try."

Kirk stood by the bed watching Spock. "Bones, I need to touch his face, and hold his hand against mine." He thought for a moment, then climbed onto the bed, kneeling at Spock's side. Then he lowered his head onto the pillow next to Spock, picked up one of the Vulcan's hands, and slid it under his face. He held the other hand to the upper side of his face and reached out to press his fingers into the meld position on Spock's face. He closed his eyes, blocking out McCoy, sickbay and his own awkward position.

*Spock... My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts.*

Push out everything else, concentrate on Spock's mind.

*Spock, let me help. Let me reach you. I'm not sure what I have done to you, my friend, but I did not mean to hurt you. I'm not sure if I am in your mind, but I think you need me. It's all right, I'm ready to understand now. Please let me help you. Come on, Spock. Come on. I'm in your mind. I'm trying to push deeper.*

Jim.

*Yes, Spock. Spock, can you pull back to consciousness? Tell me what to do.*

Spock started to move and moan. Kirk pressed against Spock, using his body to hold him down. Unbidden, he thought, *Hell of a way to treat someone who doesn't like to be touched!*

A start of pain, of laughter, from Spock's mind. My impulsive friend, right to my deepest shields first. It would help if you moved off me, as your knees are blocking my lungs. No, don't go! Move your body off but hold the meld, please. Imagine you are moving slowly up through my mind. Good. Can you feel me following you? I can help you now.

*Spock, have I hurt you this last few days?*

No. The ultrasonic resonance from those bolt charges made me lower my shields to protect my brain circulation. I had melded with you before, and so at a light level you were linked to me. Don't worry - I will teach you how to control this. You must withdraw now. Move your fingers across my eyes, press, and let me go.

Kirk followed Spock's words and opened his eyes. He looked into Spock's dark eyes for a moment, then expelled a long breath.

"Welcome back, Spock. But what a journey!"

"Captain's Log, Stardate 850.607.

"The Enterprise is docked in Academy. Repairs to be carried out are detailed in the Engineering Log. We have delivered a shielded version of the proton bolts to Starfleet. Details are in the Science Log. The bolt is an especially useful weapon as it is precharged and will not drain the power of a fighting ship. All officers and crew are safe and accounted for. Relaxation and recreational leave is granted for all officers and crew.

"Captain James T. Kirk Commanding."



## *Dreams of Spock*



I awoke to capture my fading  
dreams of you.  
Your elegant-eared form seemed  
so close as to enable me to reach out  
and touch, to caress your hand -  
to offer friendship.

I awoke the next night crying, longing for  
your presence - without which I'd realised  
I was destroyed.  
I called through my empty room, and my voice,  
unable to reach you, faded into obscurity.  
During the day I can cope, allowing  
the daily pettiness of life to overtake,  
to claim me - yet here, alone in my bed,  
is when I miss you most.

I awoke afraid, fearful that my dreams  
held truth once more - and tears stung my eyes  
as I reached out to an empty room,  
and tears filled my world once more.  
Only a soft touch, a gentle caress,  
could soothe away my fears.  
Only you could calm my storm.  
One touch as you enter my room  
from yours, awakened by my fears,  
and I am calm, all fears assuaged.  
And once more, my hand safe in yours  
As you sit by my bed,  
I fall into trouble-free slumber.

Susan P. Keighley







# THE KIDNAPPING OF THE

## ENTERPRISE BELLY DANCERS

by

Helen Davison

(For Beryl)



Ensigns Jasmine Jamel and Rita York were about to perform in a talent show on Starbase 9, one of the few Federation bases that was actually sited on a member planet. The two belly-dancers had already won a number of these shows, so the organiser of this one had scheduled them last, to keep the other performers from becoming too discouraged by seeing their performance before going on themselves. It was bad enough that their reputations had gone before them - although to the possible relief of the organisers of the talent shows they entered, that reputation was sufficient to persuade some of the less talented hopefuls to withdraw, knowing that they had no chance against the Enterprise's skilled - and unusual - entry. Their participation also insured that all the seats in the hall were sold.

As always Nurse Chapel accompanied the two Ensigns backstage, where she helped them to get ready, as well as keeping the other performers from harassing them. Good though they were, they still suffered badly from pre-performance nerves.

The show started. Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy were in the audience, of course, along with as many of the Enterprise crew as had been able to get tickets, to cheer on 'their girls.'

As turn followed turn the ship's senior officers exchanged quiet comments, some critical, some appreciative. By the time the girls appeared they had decided - between themselves - that once again nobody had produced an act that would defeat 'The Enterprise Belly-Dancers'.

As the girls appeared the cheer from the Enterprise crew drowned the gasp from the rest of the audience. The room soon quietened as the music began and the girls swirled and wiggled.

Among the audience was Ombuse of Letho, on Starbase 9 to represent his ruler, Emperor Tuce, in talks that were being held between the Federation and his home planet, which was not a member although it had trading links with the Federation.

Ombuse was absolutely enthralled by the dance. He had never seen anything like it in his life; this energetic dance was completely unlike the more sedate dances of his home planet.

After the show (which they won, of course) Ombuse went away with the image of the two dancing girls firmly fixed in his mind.

Also firmly fixed in his mind was the conviction that his Emperor would find the two girls as enthralling as he had.

With that thought came the recollection that the 25th anniversary of Tuce's coronation was almost upon him, and as yet

Ombuse, an ambitious diplomat, had found nothing to give to his ruler to mark the occasion. Now, it seemed, he had found the answer to his problem.

Tuce was a connoisseur of the female form; he collected beautiful women as some men collect rare gems. These two girls would make an excellent addition to the collection of girls who lived in Tuce's summer palace, Ombuse decided.

He made enquiries.

Luck, it seemed, as with him. The winners of the talent contest were to appear in a charity show; this would provide the perfect opportunity to acquire them, and he could have them away from the Starbase in his diplomatically-immune private ship before they were discovered missing.

He employed two dropouts from among the drifters who were always to be found hanging about a spaceport - even Starfleet ones - looking for casual work. He explained with deceptive casualness that this was a 'kidnap' for charity purposes. The amount he offered them was more than enough to overcome any doubts either might have had about the genuineness of his explanation.

The two men, dressed in cadet uniforms supplied by Ombuse, decided that they had better 'disable' the dancers' chaperone first of all as they felt she would certainly be unwilling to go along with the fun. While the two girls were on stage they attacked Nurse Chapel, a palmed hypo containing a tranquilliser knocking her out instantly. They dumped her inert body in a small cleaners' cupboard with the buckets and brooms.

Two or three of the other performers were watching the dancers from the wings. One of them looked suspiciously at the 'cadets' as they took up position where they could see the stage.

The younger kidnapper grinned disarmingly and muttered, "Nobody's being hurt - we're doing a charity stunt."

The singer nodded, satisfied, and as a result none of the performers intervened when the 'cadets' seized Jasmine and Rita as they left the stage after their final curtain call. A protest from Rita was silenced with a jab from a hand phaser in her ribs, and reluctantly they accompanied their captors from the building.

Christine Chapel came round to find the performers' room in darkness. She was alone. She wandered out onto the stage and looked about her. The audience stalls were empty. She was feeling fuzzy, and slowly her mind began to clear. Vaguely she remembered the two cadets who had approached her, but that was all.

*How long have I been here?* passed through her mind. She decided that she had better return to the ship, so she called the transporter room and was beamed up.

A rather shaky Nurse Chapel arrived in Sickbay, much to Dr. McCoy's surprise. He was shocked to see her staggering around as if in a drunken state. Suddenly he realised that something was wrong.

"Christine, let me help you." He guided her to a chair. "What's wrong? I thought the three of you were out celebrating."

Where are our dancing girls?"

"I don't know. I've been drugged and have only just come round. I thought Jasmine and Rita were back on board." Christine was still collecting her thoughts together.

"No, they haven't. The Captain's been looking for them. Stay there, I'm going to call him." He went over to the intercom.

A few minutes later Captain Kirk arrived in Sickbay.

"Nurse Chapel, are you all right?" he asked, looking at her in concern. "What happened? Where are Ensigns Jamel and York?"

"I don't know, sir." Christine shook her head. "I thought they would have returned here when they couldn't find me. As to what happened, I was attacked and drugged by two men in cadets' uniforms. I came round about half an hour ago."

"Right. I'll get Starbase Admin. to page the girls. They couldn't have gone far," Kirk said. *I don't like the sound of this,* he added to himself.

The reply they got from Starbase Admin. was that the two Ensigns and the cadets seemed to have disappeared.

Meanwhile, Jasmine and Rita were being presented to Ombuse. He was delighted and mentally rubbed his hands together as he thought about how little he had had to pay out to get such a gift to please his master, just the meagre sum of money to the two drifters who had snatched the dancers for him.

He ordered that the girls were to be drugged and their costumes changed for the all-enveloping Letho female outdoor dress. Their dancing costumes were packed carefully away to be ready for use at the girls' presentation to the Emperor. Then the diplomat and his party - including the two girls, each with a phaser poking her in the ribs - left Ombuse's quarters and headed for the docking bay where the diplomatic ship was waiting for them.

Emperor Tuce's celebrations were in full swing. The scene in the apartment assigned to Ombuse and his party was one of defiance. The two Ensigns were standing dressed in their costumes stubbornly refusing to leave the room.

"Now, my beauties, you are going to dance for my Emperor, who is to be your new master." Ombuse believed that the members of Starfleet were only slaves, and that therefore the girls were only changing one master for another.

"And if we refuse?" Jasmine asked, testing him.

"I will personally see that you die as slowly and painfully as I can make it," he said with relish. "I will also invite the Emperor to watch, for he likes nothing better. But I am sure that your dancing will please him just as much."

"We will dance," Jasmine told him. They intended to escape at the first opportunity.

When they entered the presentation rooms, a steward came forward. "Diplomat Ombuse, the Emperor is ready to receive your gift now."

The diplomat's guards ushered the girls into the back of the crowded room as he went forward to the enthroned Emperor.

"Oh Great Emperor!" He bowed low. "I have brought for you two beautiful Earth girls who dance so seductively..."

"I doubt that they are as good as my Orion slave girl," the Emperor said, half bored with the proceedings. "But let us see them anyway."

He clapped his hands. The music started, and the two girls wove their way into the centre of the room and began to dance.

Tuce couldn't take his eyes off the girls as they danced about the room. *Hmmm*, he thought. *They are delightful*. He let his eyes roam over Jasmine's shape as she shimmyed at Ombuse before passing on.

Rita shimmyed at a guard, who tried to grab her as she slipped from his reach; he checked himself as he remembered that these girls were now the property of the Emperor.

The dance ended, and the girls were in the centre of the floor. Tuce clapped his hands and the steward hurried forward.

"Take these girls to my collection," Tuce ordered.

The steward signalled some guards and the girls were escorted out of the room. Tuce beckoned that Ombuse was to come forward. Ombuse stood at the bottom of the throne steps, and Tuce leaned forward.

"Well, Ombuse, you have indeed pleased me. But tell me, where did you find such beauties?"

"The girls were appearing in a talent show on Starbase 9. They won that, and then a few days later appeared in another one, after which I collected them to bring them here."

"The girls could be Starfleet personnel. Ombuse, you fool!" Tuce thought for a moment. "Still, who could trace them here?" He liked the idea of owning two delightful Starfleet members.

The two girls arrived in the Emperor's Zenana. Matron, whose word was law among the occupants of the harem, came forward to deal with the new girls.

Jasmine and Rita glanced around them. The room they were in, a preparation room, was surrounded by four arches, two of which led to corridors containing night rooms, some with doors and others closed by a curtain. The third archway led to a staircase going up to the 'out of favour' dormitory, where the least popular girls slept. The final and largest arch led out into the day rooms and gardens.

Jasmine and Rita could see couches and cushions with girls lounging on them. Curtains hanging from more arches hid more girls from view. Girls began to appear from all directions as the news

about new occupants reached them. There was a lot of giggling and chattering, until Matron ushered the noisy flock away.

Their dancing costumes were removed and transparent robes draped about them. Teela, the Orion slave girl, had learned of the girls' arrival, and came over to examine them. She seized hold of Jasmine's chin and roughly turned her face from side to side, silently studying the girl. Teela then whipped off Jasmine's robe and began to prod her here and there, assessing her beauty.

Matron returned and shooed the Orion slave girl away. "This way, you two," she said, leading the girls through one of the arches into a corridor of rooms. "Ignore Teela," she advised them. "She likes to make new girls uncomfortable. Your new names are Seul and Maxixe. These are your master's names for you. You no longer have your birth-names."

Jasmine and Rita paused and looked at each other, unsure of their feelings. The Zenana and its customs were beginning to daunt them.

The girls were shown into their room and left alone to look around. Curtains and tapestry covered the walls, and the main item of furniture was the large bed under the only window in the room.

Jasmine was the first to speak. "If the Emperor tries to have his way with us, we can deal with him."

"Like he was one of the men on the Enterprise." Rita caught on to the idea. "Even the worst of them was more appealing than that slob of Human flesh."

"Yes, I agree with you. Anyway, he's already got enough girls to satisfy his pleasure. Shall we treat him like that young Ensign a couple of months back?" Jasmine asked, remembering.

Rita giggled. "I can't wait to see his face as we stop him." She too was recalling the incident that had happened on the Enterprise.

The time came sooner than they thought. That evening Tuce could not wait any longer before he paid the new girls a visit. He made his way down to the Zenana, and Matron pointed out the girls' room to him.

As he approached Jasmine and Rita heard him coming and lay in wait for him. When he entered Jasmine hit him with a pillow and they both pushed him through the door. He tripped over Rita's ankle and landed in an undignified heap at Matron's feet. Matron looked at her master in dismay.

Tuce burst out laughing. "That's what I like - a bit of spirit!" he assured her.

The Emperor liked spirited girls. He let them have their way until they finally submitted to him. It made his victory all the sweeter. He hunted game in his park the same way. The spirited animals would escape all his traps until finally they were cornered. The passive girls he took as ruthlessly as he killed the easy game.

Tuce visited Teela that night. She had been wild until she had submitted and he had finally taken her. Now he had complete control over her.

The next day Teela was furious to find that the Emperor had ordered that the usurpers go unpunished.

Jasmine started to explore the Zenana's day rooms and gardens. In the middle of the largest day room was a bath the size of a small swimming pool. She called Rita over - the girls still used their own names to each other. Rita joined her and they entered the pool for a swim.

Teela was keeping her eyes on these two, so that she might be able to get them into trouble. She went to the pool side to watch them, then called the other girls over and they began to poke fun at Jasmine and Rita. Teela was popular with the other girls, and no way was she going to let the newcomers make any friends if she could help it.

Matron arrived and shoed the crowd of girls away. Jasmine and Rita changed their stroke as they completed a length. Matron stood and watched them for a little while, shaking her head. *What am I going to do with them?* she thought as she went off to her tasks.

When the girls left the pool attendants were waiting to wrap them in large towel-like sheets.

Matron returned. "Seul and Maxixe, you are lucky that you are not being punished." If Matron had not been ordered otherwise by her master she would already have had them punished. "Beware of Teela - she is jealous of all newcomers to the Zenana. Come, it is time for you to practice your dance. You have been commanded to dance again tonight." She led them through the rooms to a cleared area. "Later the master may wish to visit you."

She did not see Jasmine's wink at Rita, for in preparing the girls for Tuce's visit, Matron had unwittingly warned them.

Teela had followed the girls and watched as they practiced, half-hidden in the shadow of an arch.

That night the two dancers were brought before Tuce and his courtiers. Jasmine and Rita danced, ignoring Tuce as they teased the other men in the room. Tuce was far from being annoyed by this treatment; in fact he was enjoying the frustrated looks that were passing over the mens' faces. His courtiers wanted to take the girls, but because they belonged to him did not dare to touch them,

A few hours later Tuce entered the Zenana. Jasmine and Rita were waiting for him. They stood half concealed, one on each side of the door. Tuce entered and looked around the room. He could just make out two shapes lying on the bed with covers draped over them - cushions Rita had gathered from the day room. He pounced onto the bed and grabbed hold of the 'girls' as they lay there.

Over the bed was a window. Jasmine and Rita launched their attack before Tuce recognised the cushions for what they were. The Emperor was thrust through the window and landed in an ornamental



pond just below, much to the indignation of the pond's inhabitants. One nibbled at his coat.

He looked up to see the girls peering down at him over the windowsill a few feet above him; and laughed at their anxious faces. He was still laughing as he stood up, unhurt. Water streamed down from his sodden clothes. A worried steward hurried over with a towel, while Matron looked on in anguish.

*Surely now, Master, Seul and Maxixe must be punished, she thought.*

Tuce dismissed the steward and draped the towel around him as he made his way to Teela's room, leaving wet footprints in his wake. Matron watched him go, and decided that even if the master did not send orders to punish Seul and Maxixe, she would arrange it anyway.

Teela enjoyed the visit of her master, but she knew it would be only a matter of time before the new girls were broken, like herself before them, to her master's will.

The next morning Matron gave out orders that Seul and Maxixe were to be punished, even though she had not received any instructions from her master. The girls were locked in their room, and no food or water was sent in.

*They'll soon learn to love and worship their master, and not insult him.* Matron could not understand Jasmine's and Rita's resistance to her master.

Teela took the opportunity to make Jasmine and Rita a laughing-stock among the other girls. She called a group over and began to dance in mimicry the dance she had seen the Ensigns practice the day before. Her movements were jerky and wild, with gross exaggeration on some of the movements. It lacked the graceful fluidity that had attracted the Emperor and his men to Jasmine and Rita as they danced. The watching girls were laughing, and others came over to see what was happening. Matron came over too, to see what all the noise was about. She watched Teela for a minute with the other girls, then stopped it. Teela had played that trick long enough.

Princess Aner, the out-of-favour daughter of the Emperor, having heard about her father's misfortune with his latest toys, decided to pay the two girls a visit. So while everyone was busy watching the antics of the Orion slave girl, she climbed through the very window her father had fallen out of the night before into the girls' room.

"Shush!" she cautioned the startled girls. "My name is Aner. I am one of the daughters of your master. Don't worry, no-one knows or cares that I am here." Aner settled down on the bed and looked at the two girls, who were sitting on the floor playing a game, a form of jackstraws, with various hairgrips and ornaments that they had found in a drawer while exploring the room.

"Tell me, what are your names? No, not my father's names for you," she enquired as she watched them, still puzzled by what she saw.

"I am Ensign Jasmine Jamel, and this is Ensign Rita York. We are both Starfleet officers assigned to the USS Enterprise."

"Starfleet personnel! That fool Ombuse!" Aner exclaimed. "Don't worry, I'm going to contact your envoy here on Letho. He can contact your ship, and then it will be only a matter of time before you are rescued." Aner made it sound so simple, but she warned them, "In the meantime, you must hold out against my father. If he takes you, all will be lost and you cannot be saved."

"What do you mean, we can't be saved?" Jasmine probed.

"If you get away from my father before he takes you, he will soon forget that you even exist; but if he takes you - he will remember you. From time to time he does a complete round of his girls, visiting each in turn. There have been girls who have tried to escape. My father has many agents spread across the galaxy, and to them he sends out orders to find the girl who has escaped. Soon the girl is either dragged back alive, or her head has been presented to my father as proof that she is dead." Aner shuddered as she recalled one such occasion, and changed the subject. "Teach me your game."

Jasmine seized the chance to get away from the gruesome topic, and began to show Aner how to play the game, which was new to her. Eventually she had to leave, and climbed out of the window - she had been there longer than she had intended, and might have been missed.

Unknown to Aner, Teela had seen her leaving the dancers' room through the window. *I must keep an eye on this*, the Orion girl thought.

Meanwhile Jasmine and Rita were planning their next move. That night they again cast their spell over Tuce as well as his courtiers.

Later that night, as he arrived in their room, the girls, who had kept their costumes on, began to dance. They managed to keep just out of his reach as they coaxed him out into the dayroom.

Tuce followed his bewitching girls, enjoying their graceful, seductive movements. He followed them as they drew him this way and that, dodging his outstretched arms. They wove in and out of the arches and round the couches and piles of cushions. Finally they tangled Tuce up in a curtain and were back in their room before he had freed himself from the material.

Tuce followed them to their room. The door refused to open because Jasmine and Rita had managed to push a heavy chest in front of it and were leaning against it. Tuce laughed. The girls had tricked him again.

*It will be a pity*, he thought, *when they finally submit to me.*

Matron had seen the girls' performance, and she shook her head. *Seul and Maxixe have still not learned their lesson. What AM I going to do with them?* she pondered.

Aner had also watched the events from behind a screen, and she sighed. A few more days, and they would all be free.

On board the Enterprise Ensigns Jamel and York were listed as 'Missing - suspected of desertion'. That was the official log entry, and there were some of the crew who believed that Jasmine and Rita had eloped with the two cadets, as none of the four had been found.

The Enterprise had finally left Starbase 9 to continue her voyage. They had delayed long enough to search for the two girls. Captain Kirk, along with a number of the crew, were upset to think that the two promising young Ensigns had disappeared without a trace, so when he received a message concerning the missing Ensigns, he was astounded at the contents. He called a meeting of his senior officers.

"Well, gentlemen," he said as they settled down, "I have received some startling news concerning our missing belly dancers, Ensigns Jamel and York."

"Out with it, Captain. Where are they?" Dr. McCoy demanded impatiently, for he still could not believe that the girls had deserted.

"Envoy Marshal, who is the Starfleet representative on the planet Letho, has sent me some information. Apparently, the two girls were kidnapped - possibly by the men who knocked out Nurse Chapel - were taken to Letho as a present for the Emperor, and are now installed in his harem. The Envoy has been told that the girls have so far resisted all the Emperor's attempts to make love. His informant gave him an example - it seems that a few days ago the girls managed to throw the Emperor into an ornamental pond." Kirk paused.

"I believe they were apt pupils of Commander Flynn, after they had persuaded her to teach them judo," Mr. Spock stated.

"I patched up young Ensign Rollings after he tried to break into their room," McCoy recalled.

"Why didn't I hear of this?" Kirk demanded.

"Well, the girls talked me out of telling you. They said Rollings had already been punished - after all, he wasn't sure as to what had hit him," McCoy confessed.

"How badly hurt was he?" Kirk decided to find out more about the incident.

"Mainly bruises and a broken finger. You can check the records. I didn't falsify the log report. I just put it down as a fall - which he *did* have after the girls had thrown him out of their room."

"In future I want to know about these incidents," Kirk stressed. "Right now we have to go and rescue our two Ensigns. I've already changed course for Letho, and Starbase 9 has been informed as to what happened. If we can get Jamel and York back then their records can be corrected. The diplomat who had them kidnapped will also be dealt with. Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, you are to accompany me to fetch the girls. Thank you, gentlemen, that will be all."

He dismissed them and returned to the Bridge. Lt. Uhura greeted

him as he stepped from the turbolift.

"Captain, Starbase 9 have just contacted us. They report that they have arrested the diplomat Ombuse, the Envoy for Letho, and have charged him with the kidnapping of Enterprise personnel," she concluded, sounding very puzzled.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Kirk sat back in his chair, sensing the puzzled glances from the crew on the Bridge. *I hope we're in time to save the girls*, he wished fervently.

Back on Letho, Jasmine and Rita were again being punished. Aner paid them another visit, and this time she smuggled in food and drink. Jasmine and Rita feasted on the food with a hearty appetite. While they ate Aner brought them up-to-date with the latest news.

"Your ship is already on its way, so we only have to wait a few more days before we can be rescued. You did well last night," she praised them, "but can you keep it up? For once my father has taken his pleasure of you even your Captain cannot free you from his possession." Her praise changed to a warning.

"Don't worry, we have all day to think up our next move. Take tonight, for instance - we've planned to make good use of our dancing veils. Just you wait and see," Rita informed her.

"Aner, there is something we would like to know the reason for," Jasmine asked tentatively.

"Go on."

"Why are you the out-of-favour daughter?" Jasmine asked curiously.

Aner smiled. "Partly because I refuse to comply with my father's wishes. He wants me to marry Prince Tigor of Aurus, who I detest immensely. The man I love and wish to marry is your Envoy, Marshal. We will be coming with you when you escape. The other reason is that I think for myself, unlike my sisters; and I also do as I wish, not as the men in my family order me to do," she explained.

"Thank you for all your help," Rita said quietly.

"Don't mention it. It gives me a good chance to visit Marshal," Aner said with a secretive smile. She got up from her seat on the bed. "I'll join you later." She left them.

Teela was there to see Aner leaving the girls' room. *I wonder what the out-of-favour Princess has to do with those two good-for-nothings* passed through the Orion girl's mind. *Maybe I could make good use of the information*, she thought evilly.

The girls again danced for Tuce and his courtiers. They danced seductively to both the Emperor and his men, casting their spell over the room. Tuce enjoyed the antics of the girls as they danced before his frustrated men, who ached to get their hands on the girls' bodies, but who, unlike himself, hadn't a chance without getting into severe trouble. The Emperor's girls were to be looked at, but not

touched.

A few hours later Tuce made his way down to the dancers' room for his nightly game with them. Again they caught him by surprise.

Rita tugged a rope, dropping a veil over him. As he tried to free himself the two girls wound another one around the struggling bundle. Jasmine added the rope for good measure. They then forced him out into the day room where Jasmine gave the rope an almighty tug, and the poor Emperor was sent reeling and spinning about the room until finally he tripped and landed in a pile of cushions. After making sure that he was unhurt, Jasmine and Rita returned to their room.

Aner was already there. She sat on their bed doubled up with laughter. Her father was staggering off to his own quarters, because he was too dizzy to visit Teela that night.

"Poor Dad," Aner said with some sympathy. "A night in his own bed will do him no harm." She changed the subject. "And now for the latest news. Marshel tells me that the Enterprise is on her way here. Also, he's heard from Starbase 9. Ombuse has been arrested and charged with your abduction. All in all, it has been a most satisfying night," she finished with a sigh as she stretched and stood up. "See you tomorrow." With that she left the girls.

Teela was furious, because not only had Jasmine and Rita prevented Tuce from taking them, he had not been in a fit state to visit her, either.

Three more days passed, and still the dancers managed to keep the Emperor at arm's length. They were under constant punishment, which they hardly noticed because Aner smuggled in food and drink as often as she could.

Finally the Enterprise arrived, and the landing party beamed down. Emperor Tuce gave them a grand reception as he welcomed them to his kingdom. Captain Kirk asked Tuce about his missing Ensigns.

Tuce blankly denied all knowledge of them. "Starfleet personnel in my Zenana?" he exclaimed. "A ridiculous idea!"

That night a great feast was held in honour of the Enterprise officers. As the girls' dancing had become a nightly ritual, Seul and Maxixe were called to perform.

The Enterprise crew were surprised as the girls appeared before them. Weapons were dropped in front of them before they could take any action; all they could do was watch the girls dancing.

Kirk was furious at the Emperor's trick. *Here are Jamel and York, even if they ARE dancing under different names,* passed through his mind. *But how can we rescue them?*

Jasmine danced towards her senior officers. She shimmyed at Mr. Spock, who raised an eyebrow questioningly. She winked her answer, for by shimmying at the Vulcan rather than at any of the others she had told him that their spirit was not broken, and that all was well with them.

She danced away to tease some other spectators, and Rita came

over. She mischievously wiggled Dr. McCoy's favourite move. The Doctor had admitted it once when he allowed the girls to practice in his empty Sickbay, since it was bigger than their own small cabin and more private than the recreation area. He had even asked them to include the move a bit more in their dance.

The dance ended and the girls were marched off by guards. The Emperor was taking no chances, for he was now frightened that he would lose his spirited toys.

Captain Kirk's temper was rising, but there was nothing he could do as the Emperor held all the cards. He gave a signal, and the landing party got up ready to return to the ship. They left the banqueting hall and went into a corridor to beam up.

"Kirk to Enterprise," was all he managed to say as Aner appeared.

"Captain, my name is Aner. Let me help you to get your Ensigns back," she offered.

"Enterprise here, Captain," came the reply over his communicator.

"Enterprise, prepare to beam up four on my signal," Kirk told the transporter man on the other end. "Mr. Spock, your communicator, please."

Kirk turned to the girl. "Here, take this to them. They both know how to use it."

"Thank you, Captain. There is one more thing. Both Envoy Marshal and myself will be in danger from my father's wrath," Aner stated.

"I understand," Kirk nodded. "Beam us up," he said into the communicator, and the four men disappeared in a shimmer of light.

Aner hurriedly made her way back to the Zenana and round to the girls' room. She spotted the guards outside the door, so she went into the room via the window.

Teela watched Aner's entrance into the girls' room with satisfaction. She heard her master's footsteps as he entered the Zenana, so she ran to greet him. She ran up to him and whispered in his ear.

Tuza looked at her, and light slowly began to dawn on him. He petted her, and with a gentle possessive pat on her delightful rear sent the Orion girl away.

In the room Jasmine and Rita welcomed Aner. "Aner, what's happening?" they enquired, worried.

"Here, your Captain gave me this. He said you know how to use it." Aner handed the communicator to Jasmine.

"A communicator! Good old Captain Kirk!" Jasmine exclaimed.

A door flew open and the Emperor stood in the opening. "Aner!" his voice boomed. "I should have guessed that you were behind all this. The time for games is over." He was not surprised to see Aner there after what Teela had told him.

He stepped forward and Jasmine, half hidden behind Rita and Aner, flipped open the communicator and called the Enterprise.

"Captain, three to beam up," she whispered.

Within a minute the bundle of girls shimmered into thin air. Emperor Tuze stood there in dismay.

On board the Enterprise the three girls each heaved a sigh of relief.

"Welcome home, girls. Princess Aner, welcome to the Enterprise, and thank you for your help," the Captain greeted the group.

The intercom bleeped. "Two to beam up." Mr. Spock's voice could be heard. Shortly he appeared with Envoy Marshel at his side.

Aner flew into Marshel's arms. Kirk pressed the intercom button.

"Captain to Bridge. Set course back to Starbase 9."

"Captain, may I make a request?" Marshel asked.

"Envoy Marshel, if I can be of service?" Kirk answered formally.

"Will you marry us?" Aner guessed what Marshel was about to ask. He hugged her.

"And Jasmine and Rita, will you be our bridesmaids?" she asked, remembering the tales Marshel had told her of Earth weddings.

"I will be delighted, Your Highness," Kirk agreed.

"Thank you, Aner." The two girls hugged her.

Princess Aner and Envoy Marshel were married and left to begin their new life at a new post.

Ensigns Jamel and York made their statements about their adventure, and their records were set straight.

Life on board the Enterprise returned to normal - or... did it?



# THE RAINBOW DANCE

by

Elaine Sheard

The crew of the USS Enterprise had been given an assignment which had received almost universal approval. A new Starbase in Sector 12 was being officially opened, and the Enterprise had the job of representing the Federation at the festivities. The new base was on the planet Reelar, a small, rather uninteresting world. The people, however, were friendly humanoids who were trying to make their planet a popular place for ships to call. There were shops with merchandise from many worlds, gambling, various bars and even a nightclub.

It was to this last that the official party from the Enterprise was bound. Dr. McCoy for once was making no complaint about the wearing of dress uniform or the use of the transporter. Mr. Spock was the one there under protest. Captain Kirk had had to be quite firm with him.

"As First Officer of the Enterprise it's only right that you should be a member of the official party."

Spock didn't agree. "Many of the senior officers of the Enterprise would have been willing to go with you. I do not think the Reelarians will expect a Vulcan to attend their entertainment."

"You'll not be there as a Vulcan, but as a Starfleet officer. If the Federation had sent an all-Vulcan ship its senior officers would have had to attend. The Reelarians will know you are not there by choice, and will regard your presence as the courtesy it is. However, the cabaret is to end with a Rainbow Dance, I understand, and when that is over you can return to the ship with honour satisfied on both sides."

Spock accepted this, so it was the three senior officers from the Enterprise who entered the Rainbow Nightclub. They were met by the manager, a Mr. Raymond, and led to a table reserved for them. The nightclub was large and noisy, and had a brashness not found in more sophisticated establishments. The place was crowded, and with a good smattering of uniforms, not a few of them from the Enterprise.

Dr. McCoy looked around with interest. "Good heavens, Jim, who's minding the store?"

The Captain was not offended. "The whole second watch, who will be here tomorrow, no doubt. Now come on, Spock, admit it - it's not bad."

Spock managed to look affronted without changing expression. "I cannot speak for the quality of the female entertainers, but I do know that the musical accompaniment is out of tune."

The Doctor observed without sympathy, "Look, there's Uhura. She doesn't seem to mind."



And indeed the Communications Officer could be seen dancing unconcernedly.

"Obviously an exercise in good manners," was Spock's comment.

The Doctor admitted, "She did say she was coming mainly for the shops, but she seems to be enjoying herself."

Spock did not answer, but watched the entertainment with his own display of courtesy. There was rather warm champagne, and dancers and singers of indifferent quality. At last the announcement came for the Rainbow Dance, and this was of a somewhat higher standard. The girls were young and pretty, their costumes in different colours. Their hair, which looked natural from a distance, went from lightest blonde to deepest black.

The dance was watched with interest by all, even Spock having to admit that the music was at least in tune. Indeed, the Vulcan's interest appeared to have been caught, for as the girls bowed to popular acclaim and did an encore, he turned to the next table and borrowed a pair of opera glasses to study the dancers more closely.

On seeing this the Doctor couldn't resist saying, "Seen something you fancy, Spock?"

"Not precisely, Doctor, but something of interest, certainly. Captain, you did say that I would have discharged my duty when this dance was over. May I, therefore, now regard my time as my own?"

"Of course, Spock. You can return to the ship if you like."

"Thank you, sir, but I think I will stay for a while. If you gentlemen will excuse me I will take a look around."

"Very well, Spock," was the only thing his Captain could say.

When the Vulcan had walked away the Doctor asked in some surprise, "Well, what do you think to that?"

The Captain was firm. "He must have seen something interesting to do with the lights on the stage perhaps; you know what he's like."

"Yes, but I can tell you it wasn't the lights he was looking at."

The Doctor was proved right, for not half an hour later the Vulcan First Officer of the Enterprise was seen by all sitting at a table in the middle of the nightclub. He appeared to be buying one of the blonde dancers from the cabaret a bottle of champagne.

Captain Kirk went a little pale when he saw him, but said to the Doctor, "If Spock wants to get to know one of the dancers, there's no reason for you to stare."

"I can't help it, and I'm not the only one."

Indeed, though the Captain tried not to he too kept looking that way. Mr. Spock was in earnest conversation with the young lady, and it did not look to be going too well. After about ten minutes she got up and made to leave. Spock stepped towards her and spoke intently. Whatever he said provoked an instant reaction. The girl lifted her arm and slapped him hard across the face. He did not

react at all, not even blinking. The rest of the company however were quiet for a few moments, then there was the sound of renewed conversation - and, no doubt, speculation. The crew of the Enterprise were for the most part silent; even the Doctor, after one look at his Captain's face, kept quiet. Captain Kirk was very angry, and as soon as he could speak he asked almost savagely,

"What does he think he's playing at, having arguments with half-naked women in public, and in dress uniform too?"

The doctor found it necessary to defend the Vulcan. "Come on, Jim, he didn't know she was going to slap him and he probably didn't choose the table either."

"That's not the point, and you know it. Come with me - I'm going to find out what's going on."

They were walking towards the main floor when they passed a Lieutenant from the Enterprise. Kirk stopped and asked sharply, "Mr. Johnson, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be on duty?"

The young man approached his Captain somewhat reluctantly. As the ship's Paymaster and Records Officer he had to tread a path between keeping his Captain informed and respecting personal privacy. He had an idea he was about to be asked to violate this, and said carefully, "Yes, sir. Mr. Spock sent for me."

Captain Kirk had no time for subtlety. "Why was that?"

The Lieutenant stood to attention. "He wanted me to cash a personal cheque."

"For how much, Lieutenant?"

Johnson hesitated. "For a fairly large amount, sir."

It was the Captain's turn to hesitate. He knew he wasn't going to get any more details without a direct order. He finally said, "Very well, Lieutenant. I do hope you're as discreet about all your senior officers' private business."

Mr. Johnson, who had had a ringside view of the physical assault on Mr. Spock, flushed and answered firmly, "Yes, sir. Of course, sir."

"Good, and I want you to make sure that when the crew return to the ship they share your discretion. Do I make myself clear?"

The Lieutenant made the only response a Starfleet officer could when asked such a question by his Captain. "Aye aye, sir."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Dismissed."

The Doctor commented when he had left, "Weren't you a little hard on him, Jim?"

"Not at all. He'll have to learn that even integrity has its price."

It was a very thoughtful Captain and Medical Officer who made their way to where Spock was talking to a tall man in a dark suit. Captain Kirk addressed Spock somewhat grimly.

"A word with you, Mr. Spock."

Spock, his usual imperturbable self, replied, "Of course, sir."

Before the Captain could speak, however, the club manager rushed up and said to Spock anxiously, "Commander, I'm sure the young lady's behaviour was the result of a misunderstanding, as Mr. Finch here, who is her agent, will no doubt have told you."

Spock's reply was cold. "I had no difficulty understanding Miss Watson. It was the earlier conversation I had with Mr. Finch which was somewhat ambiguous."

The tall handsome man in question answered smoothly, "I merely told you that Susan would have a drink with you. If she took exception to whatever else you suggested that's nothing to do with me."

The Enterprise men were appalled at this, but Spock replied calmly, "The suggestion that seemed to distress Miss Watson was that Mr. Finch had deliberately misled her and that her contract with him was probably illegal."

Captain Kirk knew when it was time to close ranks, and speaking in his most official voice commanded, "You, Mr. Finch, will keep quiet. Now, Mr. Raymond, what about this contract?"

Mr. Raymond was flustered, but tried to sound calm. "Perfectly above-board, Captain, I can assure you."

"In that case you will have no objection to our lawyer having a look at it, will you?"

"No, of course not," agreed the rather confused manager. "It's in my office."

Spock added quickly, "Perhaps Miss Watson and Mr. Finch could be included in the investigation?"

His Captain was with him. "Good idea, Spock. Mr. Finch will stay with us while Mr. Raymond sends for Miss Watson."

Raymond also knew that co-operation was the best course. "If that is what you want, Captain, then I am only too pleased to oblige."

So it was that they all assembled in the manager's office. The Enterprise's lawyer, Lt. Allan, was examining the contracts of the nightclub employees. Miss Susan Watson, still clad in her somewhat brief costume covered only by a semi-transparent cloak, looked quickly at Spock then pointedly ignored him.

At last Lt. Allan turned reluctantly to his Captain. "The contracts are all in order, sir."

Spock suggested calmly, "They should perhaps be compared with the employees' passports. These are, I understand, kept by Mr. Raymond."

The passports were produced and Lt. Allan looked at them. This time his voice held a note of triumph as he addressed the Captain. "The passports of the three girls Mr. Finch represents have been altered to hide the fact that they are under age. This does, of

course, invalidate their contracts."

Mr. Raymond was clearly horrified. "I know nothing about that. This is the third year Mr. Finch's clients have worked for us and there has never been any irregularity."

Susan Watson had another concern. "Do you mean he's been the agent for other people before us?"

"Yes indeed. His clients have always been talented and well behaved."

"He led us to believe that he had only stopped here because his ship was damaged. Since we were travelling with him we took this job to help pay for the repairs." She turned to Finch. "You rat! We even sold some of our things to help you. You said the contracts were only a matter of form. You never said anything about altering our passports."

Finch merely shrugged. She then turned to Spock and asked diffidently, "How did you know about the passports?"

He answered gravely, "I knew you were under age, and therefore any contract entered into must be illegal. Mr. Raymond has too much to lose by breaking Federation law, so I suspected the irregularity was elsewhere."

"How did you recognise me?"

"Initially I did not, but I did recognise the necklace you are wearing. My mother showed it to me before she sent it to mark your 16th birthday."

Susan blushed, while Finch said, "I thought you Vulcans were loaded. She could at least have sent you something worth selling."

Susan replied angrily, "I wouldn't have sold my Aunt Amanda's present however much it was worth."

Light suddenly dawned on the Enterprise crew. Captain Kirk said almost gently, "Miss Watson is your cousin, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, although it is ten years since I last saw her. The unique design and composition of my mother's gift brought the family resemblance to my notice. I understood my cousin to be living on Earth with her mother. I considered it very unlikely that she would be here with her mother's consent."

Susan admitted, "I ran away from home. My mother remarried, and I don't get on with her new husband at all well. I got a job at the spaceport with two other girls. Mr. Finch offered us a lift in his ship and we ended up here."

Captain Kirk said gravely, "You were very foolish. You might have found yourself outside Federation space, or even in an Orion slave market."

Finch interrupted suavely, "They ought to be grateful to me. I just engaged in a business venture. Someone else might have taken advantage of them."

Captain Kirk was not impressed. "The law doesn't see it like that, especially in the matter of passports. Anyway, your business

sense isn't up to much; that necklace you despise is, I think, Vulcan platinum, which is worth at least twice as much as gold."

Finch was incensed by this and said to Susan, "You silly girl. If I'd known your aunt was a Vulcan I would have had the necklace valued."

"What a nasty man you are! Though my aunt's as Human as I am she'd have no difficulty in recognising what a louse you are." She then turned to Captain Kirk. "All right, I've been an idiot, but I knew nothing about the passports, nor did the others. He said he needed them for immigration purposes."

Finch interjected smoothly, "I don't think your high-and-mighty First Officer is going to like his cousin having to go to court. Even if she can convince them she knew nothing about the passports, the whole thing will get a lot of publicity."

Mr. Raymond, however, was more conciliatory. "Any law broken on Reelar is my responsibility. Since our previous conversation Mr. Finch's ship has been impounded. It will remain so until provision has been made for these ladies to be repatriated and compensation paid both to them and to us. The ladies will not be required for this. The passports are, of course, a Federation matter."

Captain Kirk accepted Mr. Raymond's sudden firmness and authority and turned to Lt. Allan. "Well, Lieutenant, you're the nearest Federation lawyer. What have you to say in this matter?"

"The law insists on prosecution, sir, unless it is considered inadvisable by a Federation representative - say a Starfleet Captain at the opening of a new Starbase."

Captain Kirk could take a hint and appreciate help when he got it. He smiled at the Lieutenant, then turned to Mr. Raymond and said formally, "As I do not wish the opening of the Starbase on Reelar to be marred by legal unpleasantness, I recommend the matter be left in your hands. Lieutenant Allan has the authority to issue new passports, and will do so immediately."

"Thank you, Captain. I think our mutual interest will be served by your recommendation. The Reelarian authorities will deal with Mr. Finch without involving the young ladies."

Captain Kirk then turned to Spock. "You'll want to arrange your cousin's return to Earth. Since we'll be going to Agrone after we leave here we could take her with us. She'll have a better chance of getting a direct ship from there."

"I would appreciate that, sir. I think I will utilise Lieutenant Uhura's help to purchase more suitable apparel for my cousin."

"Good idea, Spock. Perhaps Bones would go and find her for you."

The Doctor agreed readily enough and even refrained from any personal comment. After he had left on his errand the Captain turned to Spock and said matter-of-factly, "You know, Spock, if you had been a little more open with us we could have avoided a most embarrassing incident."

The reply was even. "I merely wanted to be sure of my facts

before enlisting your aid, Captain. I must admit, however, that the reaction to my enquiries was somewhat more extreme than I anticipated."

"Yes, I'll bet, but I can assure you that no-one on the Enterprise is going to be so tactless as even to discuss the incident."

"Indeed, Captain? And how has this most unusual state of affairs been achieved?"

"Out of respect for your Vulcan sensitivities."

"I think it is more likely to be *your* sensitivities that will be the deciding factor, Jim," was the dry reply.

The Captain smiled. "You could be right, Spock. As soon as Lieutenant Allan returns with the new passports we can get back to the ship and leave Mr. Raymond to sort out the legal complications."

"Very well, Captain." With that Spock turned to his cousin. "I think you should avail yourself of the Captain's invitation. I will undertake to inform your mother of your whereabouts. I am sure you will appreciate her natural concern?"

"You must think I've been selfish, but you don't know what it was like."

"Certainly it was very thoughtless. If you had informed your mother how difficult you found your new family commitments you would surely not have had to take such drastic action."

"I did try to, but I just didn't seem to be able to keep my temper. Look how I behaved when you tried to tell me some home truths."

"I was deliberately provocative to test your personal involvement. It proved to be somewhat deeper than I had anticipated."

"I'm sorry, Spock. You just voiced the doubts I was beginning to have, and I over reacted."

"I accept your apology, Susan. We need not refer to the matter again."

"That's all very well, but what about your colleagues? Are they going to be so restrained?"

"Captain Kirk does not encourage his crew to gossip, especially about his senior officers."

"They won't need any encouragement when they see me like this. I hardly have a change of clothes, never mind anything else."

"That can be remedied." Spock then turned to Lt. Uhura, who had arrived with the Doctor. She looked at the young girl with disfavour, acknowledging her introduction only with a nod, but when Spock said, "Lieutenant, I should be grateful if you would accompany my cousin and help her purchase clothes more appropriate to her age and circumstances," her response was instantaneous.

"I would be honoured to help, Mr. Spock." Spock handed her a

not insubstantial amount of Federation currency. She looked at it, and commented with a smile, "I can see you have a more realistic idea of the likely cost than most men."

The Doctor said with a grin, "One of the advantages of having a Human mother, no doubt."

Spock ignored this and turned to Lt. Allan who, having regarded the issuing of a new passport to Miss Susan Watson as a priority, was now able to hand this to his First Officer. Spock gave it to his cousin, saying gravely, "May I suggest that you take charge of this personally, and that it only leaves your possession when legally necessary."

"Thank you, and don't worry - I'll take good care of it from now on."

The shopping trip had gone better than Uhura had expected. The younger girl had shown excellent taste. The dress being tried on at the moment, for example, though rather colourful, looked well on a girl of her age. Uhura therefore handed the money to Susan to pay for that and two others readily enough. It was some minutes before she went to look for Susan. As she did so she was met by the assistant, who seemed to be looking for her.

"Oh there you are, Lieutenant. The young lady suddenly remembered an urgent appointment and had to leave."

"You mean she's already left?"

"That's right. There's nothing wrong, is there? She left the other things she had chosen and said you would see to the matter of payment."

Uhura reassured the woman as she paid for the clothes and asked for them to be delivered to the Enterprise, then she hurried outside. There was no sign of the girl. Uhura made a quick decision. As she rushed towards the spaceport she remonstrated with herself. For Spock to ask a personal favour was very rare. She had felt pleased and honoured that she was the one he had turned to, and look what had happened. She knew he would not reproach her, but that only made things worse. If anything happened to the girl she would never forgive herself.

She scanned the crowd, looking for the red and yellow dress. She was going to need help, so when she saw a Starfleet uniform she turned thankfully in that direction. She nearly turned away, however, when she saw who it was. Lt. Dobson fancied himself as a ladies' man. He had once told her, as he rubbed her arm, that he rather liked older women. How he had got through the Academy was a mystery; but this was no time to be choosy. As Uhura approached her colleague she saw he was draped around some poor unfortunate woman. Then she recognised the dress. All was forgiven - or almost all. The Lieutenant's habit of holding on to his female companions had come in useful. Uhura thought she was going to enjoy the next few minutes. She reached out and took a firm hold of Susan's arm herself.

"Ah, Mr. Dobson, let me introduce you to Miss Susan Watson - Commander Spock's cousin."

The reaction was even better than expected. It was as though the girl had suddenly become red hot. Lt. Dobson went scarlet as he jumped away from Susan and stammered in a horrified voice, "I'd no idea; ma'am. I meant no disrespect."

Susan tried unsuccessfully to pull away from Uhura's grasp. "Even at my age I know there are types like you, though it's unexpected in a Starfleet officer."

The young man went from red to white and Uhura began to feel sorry for him. "Since I wanted to speak to Miss Watson rather urgently I'll play down the details of how you came to detain her, though I hope this has taught you a lesson. The Captain's not blind, and being a good engineer's not going to help you much."

Lt. Dobson replied faintly, "I'm beginning to see what you mean. Look, I'm sorry about this. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Uhura gave him a smile. "You can walk us to the transportation point. I'll hold on to Susan while you decide what you're going to say to Mr. Spock when he thanks you for your help."

"Lieutenant, Miss Watson, I know I've no right to ask, but please don't mention my name to Mr. Spock."

Susan had stopped trying to get free from Uhura and asked, "You're not afraid of Spock, are you? I mean, he's not going to be angry with you. It's not as if I'm a Vulcan."

There was silence for a few moments as the two Enterprise officers thought of the reprimand possible from their First Officer and their Captain, but Uhura merely answered, "We all hold Mr. Spock in great respect, and you are a member of his family."

No more was said as they walked to the Space Centre, from where they all transported to the Enterprise. Uhura took Susan to her cabin, and after giving her a cup of coffee, had a long talk with her. As a result of this talk she made a report to Mr. Spock and then at his request took Susan along to his cabin and left her there.

Spock didn't offer refreshments, but did insist that she sat down. He then studied her for a few moments. The dictates of female fashion were a closed book to the Vulcan, but she looked neat and tidy.

She met his eyes uneasily and said almost bitterly, "I hope you think I'm suitably dressed and didn't waste your money?"

"I in no way question your taste, and the financial details are unimportant. I am, however, concerned by your lack of trust. Rather than accept my help you seem intent on repeating what you have already admitted was an error."

She began to sniff, but answered defiantly, "I'm not going back. I'd die!"

Spock sat down and said calmly, "Why did you not confide in me and give me a chance to help? Although we are almost strangers I understand you have a close relationship with my mother. Surely as her son you could have put your trust in me?"

"But you're *Vulcan*. You probably would not have believed me."



"I have lived among Humans most of my adult life and know they are capable of many inexplicable things. I can just accept your reluctance to hurt your mother, but in the circumstances you should have appealed to another member of your family."

The reply was still angry. "Which one? My grandfather is old and rather frail and my only aunt lives on the other side of the galaxy and is, moreover, married to an alien who probably thinks such things are Human imagination."

Spock said dryly, "I think you underestimate my father. I must agree, however, that you did right to leave before the situation became worse. You should, however, have appealed to the Vulcan Embassy, for they would have honoured your relationship to Sarek."

"I couldn't. What would I have said?"

"You could have been frank with them. Your family privacy would have been respected. However, I have spoken to your mother and the situation has been rectified."

Susan sounded frightened. "What have you done? Mother really loves him. You'll break her heart."

"I consider your continued unexplained absence could well have done that. I merely informed your mother of your whereabouts and said that as there seemed to be a personality clash between you and her husband it might be as well if you spent some time in your aunt's care."

"What did she say to that?"

"She was agreeable, only asking that you write to her."

"Your father can't have agreed to all this if he knows where I've been and what I've been doing."

"You are mistaken. He is aware that when my mother consented to become his wife she forfeited regular contact with her relations. He therefore regards it as a duty and a privilege to entertain any of her family. Any prior difficulties are considered of minor importance." Spock's tone became even more formal. "I am, therefore, instructed to ask if you will honour my parents by making an extended visit to their home."

Susan still sounded rather doubtful. "What about the rest of your family?"

"They will regard it as quite understandable that you should wish to spend some time with your Vulcan family. There is an excellent school at the Terran Embassy which will, I am sure, be honoured to accept Sarek's niece as a pupil, providing you can meet the required standard."

The girl was somewhat indignant at this. "I've always been near the top of my class."

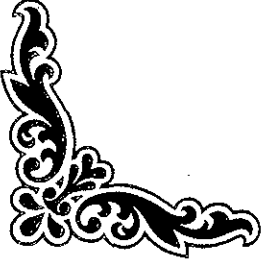
Spock was unimpressed and replied dryly, "My mother can fill in any gaps left by your lack of tuition in the last few months. Shall we regard the matter as settled?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Are you sure it will be all right?"

"Quite sure. Since I have some leave outstanding I shall escort you to Vulcan."

"Well, I'm glad something good has come out of all this. Aunt Amanda will be very happy to see you."

"No doubt," was the non-committal reply.



## HOME.

You were my salvation.  
My world on Earth had ended.  
I loved,  
Was loved  
I thought, but  
She had chosen another,  
Taken my child,  
Gone.

You were my salvation,  
My new world to be.  
I needed,  
Was needed, I hoped, by  
The crew of a Starship,  
So far out in space,  
Lonely.

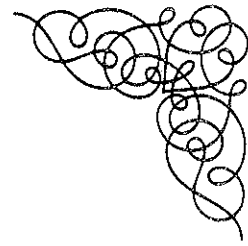
You were my salvation,  
My world rebuilt with love.  
I stayed,  
Was wanted, I knew, by  
Friends who did not question,  
My past  
Forgotten.

You are my salvation,  
My world that I call home.  
I love,  
Am loved, I know, by  
Two who know what lonely is,  
Now friends together  
Always.

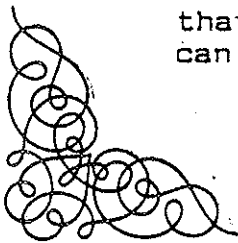


Maureen Frost

# A BEACH TO WALK ON



What sacrifices have I made  
 in my love of a Starship  
 and the wish to be her Captain?  
 For a brief, sorrow-laden moment  
 I feel regret  
 that I cannot have what other men  
 would take for granted.  
 Though they were offered to me once:  
 a loving woman;  
 a home secure;  
 and a planet-bound post.  
 Yet instead of the blue skies of Earth,  
 or the clear beaches to walk on,  
 I roam instead the stars  
 in search of adventure  
 with others like myself.  
 Why doesn't the cold of space  
 affect me more?  
 I don't really know.  
 Nor do I understand  
 why the loneliness of command  
 has not turned me away  
 from this duty.  
 I can see now  
 where the paths of my youth  
 have led me.  
 I find that my lady of romance  
 is the stars,  
 my home is a ship within which to sail them.  
 Our marriage has been firm  
 from the conception of such adventures  
 by my youthful heart.  
 It does not permit  
 to guide me elsewhere.  
 It is by my choice, then,  
 that I have chosen a different beach  
 than sand to tread upon.  
 So farewell to you  
 As I walk a different path.  
 My head has been bowed in only momentary sorrow  
 yet rises again with the conviction  
 of my choice,  
 knowing it is the only way  
 that I, James Kirk,  
 can truly be happy.



CarolMel Ambassador

# GENESIS REVISITED

by

Janice Pitkethley

Spock looked at the unfamiliar surroundings. Where he was he did not know. The sun was hot, almost as hot as a spring day on Vulcan. It was not his home planet; the skies were blue overhead and the sand beneath his feet a golden yellow. He studied the passers-by; all wore long flowing robes, some led strange-looking humped animals, other led beasts of burden laden with baskets and other goods.

No-one gave him a second glance. This was unusual - his appearance usually brought stares and comments from people different from himself. On glancing down Spock found that he was similarly dressed, the long robes reaching down to the open sandals on his feet, the strange headcovering serving the purpose of hiding his ears.

He followed the crowd, finally coming to a marketplace where strange and unfamiliar scents filled the air, combined with the shrill cries of the street sellers. The noise and bustle were distasteful to his sensitive hearing. Seeking a more peaceful place, he turned away from the marketplace.

The path led him to a river flowing sluggishly in the heat. He stared at the slowly moving muddy water, thinking about this strange place in which he found himself.

*Where am I? Why am I dressed like this? And... how did I get here?* The answers would not come. He could not remember...

A sound interrupted his thoughts, a thin mewling cry. It seemed to come from the direction of the thick growth of reeds on the river bank. Before he could investigate further voices reached his ears, and wishing to avoid contact with the native people for the present time, he hid himself from sight.

A party of young women came into view, laughing and chattering amongst themselves. From his concealed position Spock could see that the tallest girl carried herself regally, obviously of high birth. She was very beautiful, her dark hair and eyes almost Vulcan-like as she moved gracefully, speaking softly in the strange tongue which Spock could not understand. Her companions seemed to be handmaidens or attendants of some kind.

The laughing and chattering stopped as they too heard the faint cries from the reeds. The tall girl spoke some words and two of her attendants waded into the shallows of the river, pushing their way through the thick growth.

They returned carrying a crying baby. The tall girl again spoke to her attendants and they left, bearing the child away. Spock followed at a distance, curious about the whole affair. They travelled the dusty roads - which reminded him so much of Vulcan -

for some distance until the way ahead led to a magnificent white building with towering spires and domes. The guards bowed as the girls passed and disappeared through an arched doorway.

Obviously Spock would be challenged if he tried to proceed further. He turned away, and after walking some distance around the building finally came to an unguarded doorway. He managed to pass through the inner courtyard without challenge and found himself in a palace. From the design and decor he recognised it was of Eastern origin, having studied Earth history. What an example - he had only read of places like these, taking in the rich draped materials and furnishings and the marble pillars...

He was so absorbed in his surroundings he failed to hear approaching footsteps. The next thing he knew his arms were imprisoned from behind and a long curved blade was held at his throat. His captors dragged him from the room and through a maze of corridors and into a large hall. He was flung down in front of a flight of broad marble stairs.

As the guards released him he raised his head. He was kneeling in front of a throne, where sat a huge man dressed in rich jewelled robes.

"I am the king!" the man roared. "So - you have brought me a spy - and a strange looking one at that. What is your name, spy?"

"I am called Spock. I do not wish..."

"Silence! We know what to do with spies. Guards! Take him away!"

Again the sadistic and rough guards seized Spock and dragged him from the room. "Get in there!" They pushed him through a barred doorway which slammed shut with a resounding clang. Laughing evilly, the guards left him to his fate - whatever that was...

Spock found himself in a stone arena encircled by high walls. The king and his court sat looking down into the arena, as did the beautiful girl and her attendants.

*What is the purpose of all this?* Spock thought as he stared around the enclosure.

He soon found out. A blare of trumpets sounded and the barred gate at the far end of the arena began to lift, creaking loudly. A large black-maned head appeared as the beast entered the arena, followed by another and another. Lions!

They made straight for the Vulcan standing in the middle of the arena, the leading animal growling low in its throat. They began to circle, the powerful muscles rippling under the tawny hides. Spock could not help a shudder as he thought of those powerful claws tearing at him... and those teeth...

*Control! I am a Vulcan!*

But too late. In that brief second the lions had caught the scent of fear. The leader crouched, ready to spring, teeth bared and gleaming amber eyes fixed straight on the Vulcan. Up above the people began to cheer as another lion went into the crouching position. Spock was surrounded now... as the first lion launched itself forward, the roaring grew louder and louder, blotting out

everything else...

Spock woke with a start and reached over to silence the auto-call. He lay back on the pillow for a moment, looking around at the familiar quarters. It was no myth; Vulcans certainly *did* dream - and clearly, too.

*It is my own fault*, he thought, remembering his childhood and how he had begged his mother Amanda to be allowed to read her collection of Bible stories...



## BIGOTRY

"Leave bigotry in your cabin -  
There's no room for it on the Bridge."  
An easy order to give... But Stiles knows I mean it.  
"Aye, sir." - What else could he say?  
But I know his words are empty.  
You do not disarm prejudice with an order,  
You only drive it underground.

I had never thought  
That others on the Bridge were prejudiced; yet it seemed  
That they too shared the sudden suspicion  
That only Stiles was rash enough to voice,  
Swinging around to stare at Spock  
When they saw the Romulans' pointed ears.

Fools, all of them! Not to realise  
That if Spock was a spy, as Stiles suspected,  
He would have done the very best he could  
To stop us seeing the crew of the Bird of Prey.  
Of course  
They could have wanted to discover Spock's reaction  
To seeing how our enemy resembled him...

Well, Stiles has overcome his prejudice -  
As far as Spock is concerned. I would not like to state  
That Stiles will ever love the Vulcan race -  
He always had a tendency to xenophobia.  
I plan to recommend  
His transfer to a Human-only ship  
Patrolling Human-only space.

And Spock? He shrugged it off, of course -  
"I saved a trained navigator... I am capable  
Of no other feeling in this matter." But I saw  
The expression in his eyes when Stiles attacked him;  
And the look he threw towards me when he knew  
That I, at least, did not doubt his integrity.  
My Vulcan - and my friend.

Sheila Clark



# *The Wond'ring-Eyed*

A moon-drench'd cloud  
 Is cast aside as  
 The veil of a concubine  
 To reveal her dark perfection.  
 Silver sheen'd with light  
 Star-misty beckons she,  
 The wond'ring-eyed.  
 Star-child of Terra,  
 His mind now vast  
 In daring vision,  
 His soul infinite  
 In its expanse.  
 No fetters bind his mind quest,  
 His spirit bird flies free,  
 Soars beyond the limits  
 Of custom and of caution  
 To the farthest stars,  
 With certainty beyond audacity.  
 Beyond the vaults of his horizon  
 There stands another, like  
 Yet unlike, stirred anew,  
 As the night's cool whisper  
 Soothes his day-burnished world,  
 And mutely beckons she,  
 The wond'ring-eyed.  
 There bonds of Tradition  
 Restrain the beating wings  
 Of a Vulcan eaglet  
 Whose war-torn being  
 Chills in desire  
 For the night's anonymous embrace,  
 And strains to know  
 Her secret mysteries,  
 To become her divining priest; then -  
 A shared breath, sudden,  
 In-drawn, a fleeting echo,  
 The sense of another, a shadow,  
 Like, yet unlike,  
 Unknown, unheard in this  
 Busy chatter of consciousness,  
 Yet conceived immortal within  
 The halls of time,  
 Vulcan and Human love.  
 Children now, they await,  
 Star-bewitched by the night,  
 The galaxy they covet  
 Claims the men they will become,  
 Like, yet unlike,  
 And ever wond'ring-eyed.

Linda Spencer



# A Little Vulcan T.L.C.

by

Wendy A. Montgomery

"Captain's Log, Stardate 1313.8

"Confirmation has just come through from Starfleet Command as to the identity of the young girl we picked up on Avaal. As the only child allocated on the expedition, Julia was the daughter of scientists James and Alice Evans.

"All evidence points to the fact that the ten Earth scientists were killed by the natives they were sent to study. No in-depth investigation was undertaken at the time of our reply to the distress call. The Council had ordered the planet quarantined and the remains packed in stasis for shipment.

"Tricorder readings led us to the eight-year-old. She had either been forced into, or had sought shelter in, an abandoned irrigation tube. Whatever happened there has horribly affected her. She has not spoken a word since we found her.

"Starfleet Command and the Interstellar Research Department have handed down a decision that is hard for me to adhere to. It won't be easy to inform my Chief Medical Officer. He has become very fond of the child."

Kirk switched off the recording and sat back in the command chair. Nervously he bit at his thumb as he scanned the faces of his bridge crew. No-one had paid any attention to his words; all eyes were glued to various panels.

It was almost the end of watch, but he couldn't wait any longer to speak with McCoy. He had to spit it out before he lost his nerve.

"Spock, you have the con," he ordered, entering the turbolift. "Sickbay." The lift took off with a jerk.

Sickbay appeared deserted when he entered. It seemed to be that way every time he came lately. "Bones!"

"Jim, what brings you down here at this time of day?" McCoy asked soberly, emerging from an examining room.

"A headache - and some bad news."

For the first McCoy handed him two small tablets and a glass of water; for the second, he offered a sympathetic ear. But the compassionate friend turned into a hostile physician as Kirk laid out the bottom line.

"They have got to be kidding! There's nothing wrong with that child that a little loving attention won't cure. I can't believe they would put her in some institution!" He almost shouted his objections.



That brought Kirk's headache on with force. "Please, Bones, my head." He winced - the tablets seemed to be taking longer than usual to get rid of the ache this time. "They have no choice. There are no traceable relatives. Then there is her mental status. We've had her for two weeks already, and she hasn't made much progress. I wouldn't call getting her to eat for you by opening her mouth and you stuffing the food in a great deal of positive improvement. She still doesn't acknowledge your presence; only opens up on command.

"If there was something I could give them as proof that we have made a breakthrough, I could fight for an alternative. Private citizens offer to find foster homes for children orphaned in space, but no-one is going to want the responsibility of what she is. I don't like it any more than you, but Starfleet is going by the book. Even I know they are more qualified to handle this than we are. They have experts in this sort of thing."

"Well, they can't have her until we reach Starbase 14, and that's not for another week - although if you could slow the ship down some, it would give me a little more time. After all, we don't have any pressing assignments."

"All right, I'll see what I can do. I wish you luck with the child. But be warned, they will accept nothing less than a talking, coherent child."

"We'll see."

His piece said, his headache finally on the road to being vanquished, Kirk left his C.M.O. alone with his scheme. He really didn't like the idea of placing a young girl in a hospital environment alone, but he couldn't fight all of Starfleet Command. He headed for his quarters to start the hundred-and-one bits of paperwork associated with their little passenger.

McCoy stood in the doorway of Julia's private room, studying the still figure. She sat in a chair beside her bed, her deep blue eyes staring into empty space. Her shoulder-length hair had been trimmed and combed into a simple style by Chris Chapel. Every morning the Head Nurse washed and maintained the dark-brown strands of fine hair.

The entire medical department had worked with the girl. Still, it had taken him ten days to get her to the limited point she was at now. What they were demanding of him was impossible.

Chris Chapel enjoyed taking her break in the middle of the day shift when the mess was deserted, so it was something of a surprise to the other duty nurses when she held off going until late. She normally hated the crowd, but today she sought one particular person. She had a plan, and needed the special talents of this friend. Together they would be a formidable alliance.

Her eyes searched every figure as they entered. Finally she spotted the one she wanted.

"Uhura!" She waved the Communications Officer over. "Have a seat."

Uhura looked suspiciously at the nurse. There was a gleam of

mischievous in her eyes.

"I need your help."

Slowly the Bantu woman sipped her coffee, prolonging the other's agony. A month ago she had gone to Chris full of excitement and was forced to wait patiently. She was only returning the favour. After about ninety seconds she conceded, "All right, spill it."

"You remember that little girl we picked up?"

Uhura nodded.

"Well, Dr. McCoy and I have opposing views concerning her. He won't listen to a word I say. I think she needs to be out with people. You know, see that not everyone is out to hurt her."

"Sounds all right to me." Then a strange smile crossed Uhura's delicate features as the plot finally sank in. "You think I would be able to talk that crusty old doctor into letting her out, don't you?"

"Well, you often have those relaxing little gatherings in the rec-room. It couldn't hurt to try a slightly unorthodox approach."

"I'll stop on my way back to the bridge. I'm sure I can get him to see things our way."

"Thanks," was all Chris Chapel had time to say before heading out. She had used all her time waiting for the Communications Officer, and now had to rush.

Rec-room C was already teeming with life when Uhura guided her ward through the entrance. She had half expected some reaction from Julia at the sudden noise, but none came.

"Uhura!" Kevin Riley shouted, waving her over. "What have we here?" Stooping, he looked directly into the child's eyes. "Hi, my name is Kevin. What's yours?"

Uhura quickly explained about the confirmation of her name, and attempted to enlist his help in their plan. Agreeing, he took Julia by the hand and moved into the crowd.

Hours passed, and despite all attempts to break through, Julia did nothing more than stare blankly at the far wall. Uhura found it growingly impossible to enjoy herself while the girl was so obviously catatonic. Finally she could stand no more. After making her goodbyes to her fellow music lovers she headed the youngster back towards her room. Maybe it took more than one try. She had got her hopes up that there would be a quick breakthrough. She would try slightly different tactics tomorrow.

It hadn't taken much to convince the First Officer to join the little jam session. In fact, when Uhura explained her plan, Spock was quite willing to add his assistance. So at precisely 1700 hours she repeated her pick-up and delivery routine.

Spock played his lyrette, while Uhura's soft tones found a natural harmony to the alien instrument. Applause and raised voices

prompted several songs.

It was halfway through an ancient Rigellian folk song that the Communications Officer was almost stunned into silence. Spock, however, continued to play. Not even when she managed to stammer out a question did he pause.

"Spock, do you see her?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Continue singing." Spock's voice never wavered from its normal expressionless tone, but his eyes settled on the girl.

Julia had stopped staring into the air and had lowered her gaze to the lyrette, and the delicate fingers that manipulated it. The Vulcan's eyes searched the others with an observer's interest; the void of blue had been replaced by a sparkle of response.

As the song drew to a close Spock's attention to Julia was just beginning. Although he had been on the landing party when she was found, he had not taken more than a professional interest in her case. After his reports were filed he left her disposition in the hands of the medical staff.

All eyes were on the First Officer as he knelt before the girl. An abnormal hush had fallen over the room. The pulsating of the ship's functional sounds pounded at the nerves of the Humans in the room, but none dared speak for fear of breaking the spell that was weaving around them.

Slowly Spock held out the instrument to just within Julia's reach. She made no physical move. Her eyes, however, raced back and forth along the smooth lines of the instrument.

"Give me your hand." Whether he meant it as an order or a request, it came out sounding the same.

Hand open, palm up, he stretched out his own towards her. Still there was nothing. It was as if nothing could draw her attention from the instrument. He repeated the request, but got no further than the first time.

Uhura decided to give her a helping hand. Reaching over she grasped the small appendage and placed it in the Vulcan's.

An instant of discomfort ran across the stone features. A fire ran through every nerve of his body. An ever so slight shudder escaped him as he fought to regain control. The emotions of horror, agony and loss reached out to consume his soul. He found he could not disengage her touch. It was almost as if their hands had been fused together.

Quickly he disciplined himself to reinforce the barriers he had so carefully maintained. Had he properly prepared himself, he would not have suffered so. It was pointless to look back at what he should have done. Instead he continued with his actions.

Lightly he ran her fingers over the strings, his left hand forming the basic chords. It took only a few moments to produce results.

Heavenly blue eyes locked with cold brown. Somewhere in them he could see a plea for help he could not ignore; but time would not

permit prolonged contact this time. The encounter with her raw emotions had drained his strength.

It was getting quite late for the child, and after requesting Uhura to accompany Julia back to her room, Spock headed for his own quarters. It would take many hours of meditation to return all that she had torn from him.

Spock tossed fitfully as he slept. He had not suffered from a nightmare since he was a small boy. The sensations of fear and terror gripped his soul, and made his heart pound hard within his chest. A stream of sweat ran down his back, soaking into the sheets. He could feel legs running, pounding hard against the soft earth. They were not his. He heard distant screams of pain, and knew he was screaming too.

Like a slap in the face he snapped to consciousness. His cabin was dark, he was alone. He focused his thoughts inwardly in an attempt to slow the pounding of his heart. His head ached both from the emotions he felt and the elevation of blood pressure.

Wiping the sweat from his face, he eased himself out of bed. He tried desperately to recall the contents of the dream exactly, but nothing solidified in his mind.

In the bathroom he splashed cold water on his face, bringing himself the remaining way to awareness; cleaned and dressed, he headed for sickbay.

From the door of her room the Vulcan watched Julia thrash about. Her mouth gaped open as if to cry, but only silence came out.

"Just what do you think you're doing here at this time of night?" McCoy's tired voice greeted him.

"How long has she been like this?"

"Oh, I'd say about ten minutes." Steadily McCoy drew near the room. "This time I was here when it started. Christine tells me it happens almost every night. She always sedates the child at the onslaught, but after what Uhura told me happened this evening, I thought just maybe she would cry out.

"Often people whose minds are temporarily locked as hers is can unconsciously reveal fragments of clues in the mutterings of a nightmare, but as of yet I haven't heard even a moan out of her. In a few minutes I'll give her something to calm her again."

"Fascinating." Spock continued to study the thrashing form.

"You still haven't answered my question. What are you doing here?" It was no secret that it took a command order from Kirk, or a set of requisitions, to get the Vulcan anywhere near the facility.

"Doctor, I wish for you to allow me the opportunity of helping her."

"Are you out of your Vulcan mind?" McCoy strained to keep his voice from being overheard by the duty nurse. "She needs a lot of tender loving care, and unless you have changed into a totally different person in the last few hours, your Vulcan stubbornness

won't allow you to give it to her."

"What you consider caring attention can be administered in several different ways. This evening she reached out to me, mentally. I felt all her rage, anger, fear and frustration. A short time ago I woke from a fitful nightmare; I believe it was induced by her."

"Spock, you don't have an abundance of experience in the area, and we haven't the time for guessing. We only have thirteen days."

"Twelve point seven three days, to be exact."

"We have just under two weeks to get her talking, or they're going to commit her."

"I believe that unwise. It would only serve to confuse her further, and help her retreat deeper into herself. We must prevent that."

"I don't want to see her in anything but a decent, happy home. If you have something in mind, and are convinced you can help, she's all yours."

"Have her ready to accompany me at the end of my watch. I will begin contemplating alternatives immediately." With one last look at the sleeping child, Spock left.

When Spock arrived at sickbay to collect Julia, he was greeted by a very subdued McCoy.

"She's back at the stage we were when we first found her." The doctor directed Spock towards the private room. "It has taken most of the day just to dress her. We haven't been able to get her to eat anything. I don't know exactly what happened last night, but I think it might have hurt her instead of helping."

The First Officer stared at the silent girl. "We shall see." Mentally he began erecting barriers against the onslaught of emotions touching her would bring. Drawing near, he extended a hand to her.

This time she took it without hesitation. There was a flicker of life in the young eyes - McCoy noticed it, even from across the room. Gently Julia tightened the grip on his hand.

"Come. It is time for the evening meal."

It pleased the doctor to see that Julia walked beside the Vulcan, not led by the hand as Uhura had done. Maybe Spock *did* have some sort of rapport with the child. He would keep an eye open for any other developments.

Spock's first stop was the officers' mess. Finding a table somewhat isolated from the bulk of the crew, he commanded the child to sit, and she did. Returning a few minutes later, he placed a dish of fruits, vegetables and cheese before her, and a Vulcan salad at his own place. In one smooth motion he sat and began to eat. Julia only stared at him.

"Eat," he commanded, selecting a piece of reddish vegetable for himself. Still there was no movement. "Starvation is not logical."

It will neither ease the pain nor bring back those who have perished. Your life must continue. Consuming food is a part of that. Now eat."

There was a sadness in her eyes as she looked down at the dish. Still she made no move to feed herself, so Spock acted. He took a slice of cheese and placed it between positioned fingers.

With some hesitation she opened her mouth. The hand was guided towards the opening, and the food deposited. Chewing was not accomplished with any speed. It took nearly two hours of the Vulcan initiating the action before she had consumed enough to satisfy him.

Kirk had come in once during the meal for some coffee, and sat watching for several minutes. He had done all he could to allow them time to work with the child. He had almost dropped with shock when McCoy first told him of Spock's request; now at least he saw further positive progress.

This night, Spock had planned something different. They would not visit the rec-room; she would be the sole recipient of a private concert in his quarters.

The child had brightened some at the sight of his artefacts. She stood for long moments staring into the ceremonial flame. Spock simply observed her. He couldn't tell if her reaction was curiosity, or if the peace of the flame had reached her.

When she moved away she spotted the lyrette. Wordlessly she pleaded to hear the soft tones.

Spock played, making no other sounds, until he saw her eyelids beginning to waver, closing slightly. Setting the instrument back in its designated place he lifted the child into his arms. Her head leaned against his shoulder, and her arms encircled his neck. Spock did not discourage the action, as it was the first natural reaction she had not been coaxed into making.

Depositing the sleeping child in her room he left her in the willing hands of Christine Chapel. He headed back to his quarters to contemplate all that had progressed during the evening, and to prepare for the work still ahead of him.

It was nearly midnight ship's time, and Uhura couldn't wait to leave the bridge. One thing she disliked about being Head of Department was that any emergency vacancy in the duty roster had to be filled by her.

Her thoughts of a hasty retreat were interrupted by the arrival of a message. She thought it odd that the diplomatic channel should be used when there was nothing pressing in store for them.

Efficiently she acknowledged receipt and channelled it into a tape. It was for Mr. Spock, from his father. Since her relief made a timely entry, she decided to hand-deliver it.

She rang once, and was rewarded with a, "Come in."

Spock sat behind his desk, studying something on the monitor. He snapped it off as the door closed behind her. "Is there something I can do for you, Lieutenant?"

"A message just arrived for you, sir."

"Indeed."

"It's from Earth; from your father." She held it out and placed it in his open hand. He deposited it into the monitor and began scanning the contents.

She turned as if to go, but took only a step before saying, "Mr. Spock, could you ever forgive me?"

"For what do you seek forgiveness?"

"For the thoughts I've had towards you lately."

Perhaps you should sit down and explain."

Uhura sat across the desk from him, but it was some time before she began to speak. "I've been angry. I wanted so desperately to be the one to make a difference in Julia's life, but I couldn't. You didn't even try, and she opened up to you."

"Tonight, when that message came through, I felt even more put out. I thought of trying to get a home for her, but couldn't get past all the red tape. I even contemplated adopting her myself, but the Captain talked me out of it."

"I see. But what you failed to understand is that you were the one to make the deciding difference in Julia's life."

Uhura brightened slightly.

"Was it not you who invited me to play for the child?"

She nodded.

"If you had not, I would not have been there to assist the breakthrough. I had no intention of participating before your request. As far as the foster parents are concerned, it was not I who found them. My father deserves that honour. I got no further than you yourself. His position on the Vulcan Council, as well as being Ambassador to Earth, has its advantages." Tomorrow would show if even they could help.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. For me, and for that little girl - in case she never says it herself." Uhura rose to leave, pausing just inside the door. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Lieutenant."

Reports had been faithfully made by McCoy to the Interstellar Research Department on the progress made by Julia. He wasn't sure what he was hoping for, but their responses sure weren't it.

Although encouraged by the contents of the reports, it was still not enough to sway their decision. His request to allow Julia to remain in Spock's custody met with an unwelcome list of regulations. They did, however, withhold a decision on the foster home until they could actually see the child.

It was on their last evening together that Spock sat back to

take a good objective look at her. She sat straight and properly, eating with a knife and fork. By request of Dr. McCoy he had added one or two slices of sweet meat to her evening meal each day. The C.M.O. explained about not giving adequate amounts of protein.

There was a healthy, almost happy glow to her complexion. There was always a sparkle in her blue eyes. Even the violent nightmares had stopped. They no longer haunted her unconscious mind. She was really beginning to adjust. But still she hadn't uttered a word.

Spock had spent many long hours every day working with her, and still the one requirement eluded them. Julia showed no signs of speaking. Not even an attempt.

After dinner they headed back to his quarters. It had become almost a ritual. Most of the evenings were spent there in lessons. Twice he had taken her to the rec-room. Kevin Riley had got the first smile out of her.

Once Spock had even taken her to the observation deck. He had spent hours pointing out stars and naming them for her. He briefly described different environments, and she listened with great interest.

As with each time they entered the cabin, Julia headed straight for the lyrette. With a hopeful expression she held it out to him.

Gently he took the instrument and set it back into its resting place. "Sit down. We must talk."

Obediently she sat in the chair he had long since designated as hers. He paused for a moment before beginning - he had to get just the right effort on his words, or the intention would be lost.

"Tomorrow the Enterprise docks at Starbase 14, and we will be handing you over to a group of doctors. I believe you should be told what will be expected of you."

Julia followed the slowly pacing Vulcan with her full attention.

"They will lock you away in a hospital for the mentally disturbed." He had chosen his words carefully. There was fear in the young eyes. "Although I do not approve, there is nothing I can do to stop them."

"I have, however, come up with a workable solution. I consulted with my father, and he knows of a couple on Earth willing to accept you into their home. They have quite a sizeable farm, and no children to share it with."

Violently Julia began shaking her head. The Vulcan knelt before her, his features as solid as stone. In the sign language that had developed between them she raised her hand to her chest then held it out to him.

"No, you cannot stay with me. It is not proper. Unless you can speak by the time we reach the base tomorrow, you cannot have the farm either." He was attempting an old form of psychology, trying to break through by giving her something else, a future to hold on to.

Instead her eyes clouded over as if to cry, and she ran from the room. He didn't follow, as he knew where she was headed. He would check with McCoy, to insure she arrived safely.



The last three minutes of his watch seemed an eternity. Spock was now finding it almost impossible to concentrate on the fuel consumption reports. They had achieved orbit nearly an hour ago, and he knew that at this moment two doctors and the base coordinator were preparing Julia for her departure.

Logically, his actions last evening should have worked. As drastic and distorted as they were, they should have forced her into voicing an objection, or crying out in protest. She had done neither. Upon checking with McCoy he found she had made it back safely to her own room. She had lain for several hours just on the verge of tears - but none came.

As soon as the officer of the day stepped onto the bridge, Spock was gone. He rushed out between the parted lift doors and headed for sickbay. The clatter that reached his ears told him they were having trouble leaving. Drawing near, he could hear Kirk's voice talking calmly.

"Julia, they aren't going to hurt you. They are going to take you to some people who can help you."

There was a whimper, and Spock knew it was the child. Purposefully he stepped into the doorway, standing stiff, hands clasped behind his back.

"Is there no-one who can control the child?" A tall dark figure stood back, observing, as Julia continued to grip the bed legs, the Federation doctors, Kirk and McCoy pawing at her.

Spock cleared his throat once, but no-one seemed to hear. "Enough!" His commanding tone made them all stop. "Julia, come with me."

Slowly the young girl released her hold and rose. She turned sunken eyes towards him as she crossed the distance. The Vulcan turned his gaze from the startled adults to the child.

"Although I read your reports, Dr. McCoy," the oriental Federation doctor whispered, "I never thought he had that much command over the girl."

McCoy's only reply was a disgusted grunt.

"We spoke last evening about what they had planned for you. You were told the requirements, and failed to accomplish them. Now you must go with them. Why do you prefer to act like a barbaric animal?"

Only her eyes changed to answer him. There was a sorrow in them, but he could let nothing sway him. He had one last chance.

"Come with me. It is time to go."

Slowly Spock walked towards the door. He listened for her footsteps, and was greeted with slow echoes of her shoes against the deck plates. Kirk and the three doctors filed behind her, with the base officer bringing up the rear.

As they walked one of the doctors edged closer to Kirk for a few words. "Captain, I can see all the progress your First Officer has

made with the child. Being C.M.O. of the Nightingale, the nearest orbiting medical ship, naturally I paid close attention to Dr. McCoy's daily reports. Mr. Spock was by no means alone in his efforts. It was I who spoke with the Surgeon General, and got him this extra time with her. After all, he is hardly qualified."

"Spock is my Science Officer." Kirk's tone was defensive. "He has had in the past a great deal of exposure to Human behaviour and the psychology of it."

"I meant no offence, Captain. I only hope we are able to continue where he must leave off. I too touched on the possibility of leaving the child with him for just a short while longer, but the Enterprise is a battlecruiser, not a qualified hospital ship. There is no place for a child, should combat be engaged."

"The Nightingale will be in orbit for the next twelve hours, then will head for Earth. You and your men are welcome to spend that time with her, if you wish."

"Thank you, Doctor, but the Enterprise should be leaving before too long. We must get back to our patrol sector. Besides, I think a quick clean break will be best all the way around."

By the time he finished the little procession had arrived at the transporter room. There, Spock stood beside the console, as still and unyielding as ever. He did not look down as McCoy ushered Julia up the steps and positioned her.

Then their eyes locked. He could see tears welling in the pools of blue. Kirk was giving his parting amenities to the officers on the far side of the room. Spock no longer listened.

Silently a tear spilled from the corner of an eye. McCoy noticed it, but when he stepped forward a hand reached out and stopped him. The Vulcan's grip was like steel as it held him back. Then he saw their locked eyes, and moved aside.

A second tear streamed down Julia's cheek. Her bottom lip began to quiver. It took all of thirty seconds before she screamed,

"NO!"

That single word contained so much agony it could have fractured the silence of space itself.

Flinging herself down the stairs she rushed towards the Vulcan. Throwing her arms around his waist, she buried her head deep into his stomach and sobbed.

Spock had prepared himself for a sudden release of emotions. On their journey from sickbay he had re-enforced all of his mental barriers for just this moment.

At first the crying was uncontrolled, and everyone was so stunned no-one dared move to disengage her. The Federation doctors stood watching, to see the final outcome of the Vulcan's therapy. It was not over yet.

A single hand came from behind the Vulcan's back and gripped a spastic shoulder.

"It was horrible!" Julia sobbed out. Even with McCoy's

advantage, he barely heard her. "They came from the sky."

Kirk heard that, and stood straining to hear any other fragments of information.

"They killed my mommy and daddy." Another round of sobs racked the frail body.

Spock's voice held a flat tone as he asked a single word. "Who?"

It took a moment before she could even begin to form the word. It stuck in her throat as if it would choke her.

"Who came from the sky?"

At the sound of the Vulcan's command she cried out the word, "Klingons!"

Kirk's mouth dropped open. He stared at the coordinates officer beside him. He could only imagine the horror she must have witnessed, to cause such a self-imposed silence.

"Commander Wilson, I believe this is evidence to justify an investigation into the matter."

"That is, if the girl is telling the truth. Children as young as she is have been known to exaggerate."

"Possibly a medical inspection of the bodies could prove something."

"Excellent idea, Captain," the 'oriental doctor replied, cutting off Wilson's response. "Since they are to be beamed over following ourselves, I will see to it that work is begun immediately."

"If you would care to use communications here to prepare your staff, you are more than welcome."

"Thank you, I believe I will. The sooner we get started, the better."

Kirk only spared a glance at his First Officer as he ushered McCoy and the visitors out into the corridor.

No-one heard the final exchange between the Vulcan and Julia.

"The farm?" a timid voice asked as she wiped tears from her face.

A large gentle hand rose to soothe her soft hair. "Yes. I shall see that you make it there."



# Truth is the Way

by

Elizabeth Rackel and Karen Hayden

Kirk looked down at the sleeping Vulcan, remembering how it had all begun...

..."Spock, I've got to send you. You are the only person aboard this ship who will not be identified as an alien. The race *is* vulcanoid, after all. You even speak the language..." Kirk's voice, deliberately controlled and level, and dangerously quiet as he attempted to make his point, trailed off.

Spock hesitated, then slowly answered, "I still think the Federation should not get involved. I am certain that they, as any other vulcanoid race, can solve their problems for themselves. And the interference of the Federation might be thought of as treason by some of their leaders."

"Unfortunately, Starfleet Command doesn't care a damn about your opinion. Or mine, for that matter. Like it or not, you *are* beaming down tomorrow, and you *will* try to stop that silly war." Kirk's voice was colder than he had intended, but he refused to see the hurt in the Vulcan's eyes as, closing the subject, he added, "That's an order, Spock."

Spock's only answer was an emotionless, extremely cool, "Aye aye, sir."

That had been nearly five days ago. Kirk shivered as the memory of that moment forced itself on him again. It wasn't supposed to happen like that. He hadn't wanted Spock to head off into danger with them practically at each other's throats. It had had to be a command decision, despite what they felt personally, and it was one which they both should have accepted without bad feeling. But they were both so stubborn...

In that moment Kirk himself admitted that fact, remembering McCoy's words of so many times before. But it didn't help.

Suddenly exhausted by the emotional strain - and the guilt - he sank down onto the side of the bed and found Spock's hand held gently in his own. They'd almost lost each other this time - in more ways than one...

"Hangar deck pressurising! Medics! Mathews, see to that fire!"

The memory of the clamour, the shouts and echoes which had resounded around the hangar deck when he had arrived to see for

himself the almost burned-out hulk of what used to be a shuttle clamoured in Kirk's brain, and he rubbed his forehead with the thumb and forefinger of his free hand, attempting to eradicate those same memories which were causing him so much pain.

He knew that the sight of a bleeding, barely recognisable Spock would haunt him for the rest of his life. It had taken McCoy hours to repair the damage, to seal the nasty wounds and stop the internal bleeding. Kirk had seen the exhaustion and despair on the faces of the operating team. Spock was still on the verge of death; the life readings above the bed were low, and he couldn't go into a healing trance because of the severe head injuries.

McCoy was now sleeping in the opposite bunk, to be on hand should Spock stir. Kirk had taken over the vigil from him, but now he thought that it wasn't really such a good idea. It gave him too much time to think, to remember...

He didn't like to send men into danger at the best of times, but having to order Spock into danger was becoming more and more difficult.

They were so close now, he admitted, that he could even *sense* Spock's presence in a room, and he knew that it was the same for Spock. He had come to rely on the Vulcan's judgement; and he enjoyed their quiet evenings together - a game of chess followed by a glass of Vulcan wine, or an evening together on the observation deck was like coming home. Spock was the only one aboard ship with whom he could drop his mask of the infallible Captain and simply be himself.

And it was to Spock that he turned when he needed help, or simply a rest from command. To lose that now, to lose that so special friend now... He couldn't bear to think about it. He knew that it would be like losing a part of himself - he doubted that he would be able to carry on at all...

Kirk stretched cramped muscles and looked quickly across to check on the still-sleeping McCoy before allowing his eyes to rest on the Vulcan's pale face. He cringed inwardly to see the still-swollen eyes, the bruises - and realised that he *did* have a problem. He had been able to send Spock on *this* mission by showing his anger to his dearest friend when he didn't want to; by allowing his command responsibilities to over-ride his concern for what could happen to the Vulcan.

But he didn't think he could do that again. There was no good solution. He simply could not get angry with Spock all the time to fulfil his aims.

He realised that he needed to talk it over - and he'd like to talk it over with Spock himself. Relieved, he sat back, quietly watching Spock and waiting for him to wake up.

McCoy had woken suddenly, but had not moved. He'd found himself watching his two friends for quite a while, assessing Spock's condition before making the decision to creep from the ward unseen. Instinctively he knew that Spock *would* be okay, but that he and Kirk needed time alone to sort out the problem he was convinced they had. He wasn't sure exactly what it was, but he knew it existed - and he realised equally that he wouldn't be able to help them directly. All

he could do was be near, and hope that his friends remembered he was there to help.

Spock slowly opened his eyes, still feeling the searing flames of the burning shuttle. Kirk saw the Vulcan shudder, and immediately covered the warm hand with his own cool fingers.

"Easy, Spock, easy. You're safe."

"Jim!" Spock almost sounded surprised. "I didn't think I'd make it... this time."

"What do you mean, you didn't think you'd make it? You gave us status reports on your oxygen resources, the equipment still working and everything else. What would you do that for if you thought you wouldn't make it?" Kirk was glad his voice didn't sound as scared as he felt.

"I don't even remember giving you any reports at all. All I remember is that panel crashing down on top of me; trying to leave the planet; and then finally attempting to fly the shuttle, keep it on course, and extinguish that fire at the same time." Spock's voice was as even as ever, even though Kirk knew he must still be in shock.

The Vulcan suddenly seemed to realise what he'd said, and clutched at Kirk's fingers as if he were a drowning man. "Jim... I can't remember! I don't remember anything except for the merest details of what I did."

"Easy, Spock. McCoy says it's quite normal to have some memory loss. You've got a severe concussion." He took a deep breath. "And maybe it's for the best that you don't remember..."

Spock looked at him, unsure of what his friend meant, but he could tell by Kirk's strained voice that something significant had occurred. "Will I live?"

Kirk smiled his smile. "You'll be fine. Just take it easy, okay?"

"I..." Uncharacteristically, Spock hesitated, then somehow finding what it took to continue, he looked at Kirk. "Has something happened to... us?"

"Nothing ever will, my friend," Kirk said reassuringly. "We had a... minor disagreement, but it's not important." He thought he'd managed to keep his voice normal, but obviously Spock had detected something.

"Jim? It is important... to you. What was the disagreement about?"

"Oh, nothing really. We can talk about it when you feel better, okay? For now, just go back to sleep." Kirk couldn't help but notice that Spock was growing tired, and he didn't want to put any strain on him.

"Jim? Will you... stay here?"

Kirk caught the hesitation. It was unusual for Spock to ask in the first place. He smiled.

"Sure I will. I'm not likely to run away, am I? I'll be right here when you wake up."

Spock nodded, reassured, and allowed his eyes to drop, sinking into the blessed oblivion of sleep.

When he awoke next time, however, Spock immediately noticed that Kirk was *not* where he had promised to be, and he struggled to sit up, his intention being to leave and search for his other half. But McCoy was beside him in an instant, preventing movement.

"You keep still, Spock. You're not going to help anyone if you try and get up now."

"But Jim..."

"He's on the Bridge. You know he'd have stayed if he could - they almost had to drag him out of here as it was - but he was needed on the Bridge."

Instantly alert, Spock's eyes asked the questions that his voice could not.

"I don't know, Spock. We soon will. And Jim will soon be back." Pushing him firmly back onto the bed the Chief Surgeon raised his voice a little. "Now rest! Or do I have to use restraints?"

"They will be unnecessary, Doctor."

McCoy nodded, satisfied, and left, intent on preparing Sickbay for the red alert that had just been declared. He didn't like lying to Spock, but neither could he have told the Vulcan the truth. He just wished that he didn't have to leave him alone at a time like this...

As soon as the door had closed behind the doctor Spock got up and left the ward.

Spock didn't know why, but it seemed very important all of a sudden to find Kirk. It was illogical, but he had a 'feeling' that Kirk needed him.

When he slipped out into the corridor he heard Uhura's clear voice, calm as ever, over the intercom declaring the red alert.

"Medical teams to the Bridge! Mr. Scott to the Bridge!"

The requests were repeated, as as Spock took that in his eyes took note of the flashing red lights. His first thoughts were of his captain. Had something happened to *Jim*? Obviously the Bridge had been hit by something or somebody. And why would they need Scott, if not to take command of the vessel...?

Quickly, even though he had begun to feel dizzy from the head injury again, Spock entered a turbolift, ordering, "Bridge!"

When the doors opened he saw a smoking nerve centre filled with debris. But he also saw his Captain in the middle of the mess, giving orders and cheering up the younger crew members - Chekov

seemed to be in bad need of cheering, for he had screamed when his console had suddenly gone up in a puff of smoke, and was now duly embarrassed. Two junior crew members were getting in everybody's way, and the medical team were busy with Davidson, Scott's substitute on the bridge. Panels indicated that the Enterprise was still taking phaser fire from the enemy vessel - and that the shields were about to drop.

Spock decided that Kirk might need somebody to help him get some order into the chaos. He quickly went over and asked Chekov to get the junior crew members out of the way. Chekov got a grip on himself and calmly ordered them off the Bridge - without any more fuss he then settled down to the repairs.

Spock took over the science computer and quickly assessed data. He realised that the shields could take another thirty minutes of those phaser blasts, and hurried to tell Scott, who gave him a quizzical look but nodded gratefully.

The medics had finally managed to get Davidson to Sickbay, and that was when Kirk noticed what had been so reassuring the last couple of minutes - Spock's presence.

"You must be quite mad! What the hell got into McCoy to let you come up to the Bridge in a state like that? Is he out of his caustic mind, or what?"

Spock didn't quite understand why Kirk was so annoyed. He didn't realise that it was simply worry, and too much stress, that were finally beginning to get to Kirk.

"I'm sorry, Captain. I thought my presence would be of some help to you. I see now that I was wrong. When this emergency is over I shall remove myself from the Bridge."

Kirk frowned, knowing that this wasn't really Spock talking, it was the pain that the Vulcan was feeling because of what he thought was Kirk's rejection - and Kirk felt duly ashamed of himself for allowing his own stress to be directed at Spock. But he could do nothing about it, for a shout behind him brought his attention back immediately to the ship and their dilemma.

"Captain! They're retreating!" It was Sulu's jubilant voice.

Somehow the Bridge viewscreen was still intact, and all eyes turned mutely towards it as the large, sleek, red spacecraft suddenly manoeuvred away from them and went into high warp, heading back the way they had come.

"We must have hurt them more than we thought. Spock, anything on the sensors?"

The Vulcan's voice was quiet, controlled, but he replied instantly. "Negative, Captain. The aliens have already left our sector and are heading back into their own space."

Kirk nodded. Only then did he allow himself a sigh of relief. "Lt. Uhura, I want reliefs for all crew members on the Bridge. And I want a preliminary report sent to Starfleet immediately."

"Aye aye, sir."

And then the Captain turned towards his First Officer and



friend. "Please come with me, Mr. Spock." He ascended the steps, lowering his voice. "Please!"

Spock looked at his Captain, his eyes still glazed from the strain of working the sensors with his head injury still causing him such pain. He nodded, rising shakily to his feet and following slowly.

Inside the turbolift Kirk ordered, "Sickbay!" then turned to Spock, placing his hand on his arm and squeezing gently.

"You shouldn't have been up there, Spock."

"You..." Spock hesitated but then, deciding that truth was the way, continued, "... were in danger. Had to be near..."

"I know. But you're ill. I almost lost you back there, Spock. I can't risk you again..."

The pain in Kirk's voice worried Spock, and he took a deep breath, answering, "You will continue to do as you have to do, Jim, as Captain of this ship. And we will cope."

Spock's eyes met Kirk's, and in that look they told each other, *I love you*. Something that neither could put into words, something that both were beginning to realise more and more each day.

Kirk drew nearer still, gripping both Spock's shoulders and squeezing. "Yes. We will."

The turbolift halted. "Come on. Bones will be madder than an Antares fire-eel when he finds out where you've been!"

Gratefully Spock allowed Kirk to help him down the corridor, the Human taking most of his weight; but ill as he felt, he also felt more content than he'd ever felt before. For Kirk had told him categorically just how much he, Spock, meant to him, and the Vulcan suddenly realised all over again just how precious, how special his life had become - thanks to Jim. He looked sideways, drinking in the sight of the other half of himself, then looked straight ahead, eager to face their futures, knowing he was home.

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# BUFFALO'S LEGACY

by

Vicki Richards

The fireshrine flickered its ancient, comforting glow, but the quiet figure seated in front of it found little peace there. Since childhood the disciplines instilled in him had been his first defence against anything even slightly unVulcan - but this time it appeared even they were not going to work effectively.

Spock eventually gave up his attempt at meditation, rose, and went to his desk with the intention of continuing with some unfinished paperwork, despite the lateness of the hour. But even that could not occupy his thoughts for very long. Repeatedly his mind went back to the scenes of that day. And the events which had unsettled him.

He put down his pen and made a conscious decision which in many ways symbolised the undercurrents of the day. If Vulcan meditation would not work for him, then he would analyse his thoughts in another way. Perhaps the way Humans did.

And that in itself was the problem. Spock sighed quietly and steepled his fingers before him. This was something he had to sort out with himself, or surely his hard-won peace of mind could never rest easily again.

The encounter with the salt creature had been no more dangerous than many other incidents they'd encountered. Not as dangerous as many. Yet the way it had been destroyed was the key to his lack of sleep.

Naturally the fact that it had been the last of its species was cause for regret. But there had been no real choice in the end. Jim had referred to it as a 'Buffalo', and the Vulcan had known what he meant. After all, Vulcans had seen as many animal species disappear on their world as Terrans had in their history, though not for quite the same reasons. No wonder Jim was regretful, too.

But if he was honest the plight of the salt creature bothered him far less than the manner of its passage, or rather, the way that situation had caused him to react. What would they think of him? And what did he think of himself?

What had he shouted at McCoy? "It's killing the Captain - shoot it, quickly!" And he'd shouted it more than once. He'd had to get McCoy out of the shock-imposed trance he was in; if he hadn't been able to get the Doctor to act, then Jim would surely be dead now. And it had worked. Poor McCoy had seen that it wasn't really Nancy Crater he was shooting, but still it had taken an effort to turn the deadly phaser on the salt creature wearing her form. Spock felt for McCoy even through his own confusion, and even though the Doctor's hesitation had endangered Jim momentarily.

And there lay his real problem. 'Feeling'. There was no

denying it, no matter how logically he studied his actions. The truth was he had entered McCoy's cabin, seen the danger Jim was in, and logic had flown out of the window. He had not cared at that moment how he acted; hadn't even thought about it, not in his usual self-analytical way. All he'd cared about was that the salt creature shouldn't kill Jim, and his actions had shown it. He'd actually shouted and shown fear - for his friend - and he hadn't cared who saw.

If he was to be completely truthful with himself, he had to admit that he had been experiencing such emotions for a long time, especially where Jim was concerned, and probably because of him. Until he had met that particular individual his Vulcan training had always held firm, but Jim had somehow always known of the Human half he so carefully hid, even from himself. It was ironic that Jim, who had always accepted him as he was without attempting to change him, should be the one person to awaken the long-hidden Human responses within him. He wasn't even sure if it was just the Human side Kirk had reached; perhaps even his Vulcan half felt this friendship.

Friendship. An emotion. Long-avoided and denied. Yet Spock found the thought, the knowledge that it was true, did not disturb him. He *did* feel friendship for James Kirk, had done for a long time. Today was merely the first time he had shown it outwardly - or obviously.

If he admitted the emotions to himself without shame, then surely it was illogical to fear Jim's and McCoy's response to witnessing his actions. Just as it was illogical to deny what existed.

Feeling a great deal more settled, Spock came to a decision. Within the spirit of IDIC it seemed logical that he should express both sides of his nature, learn all he could about both halves. He would always be Vulcan, and surely could not change overmuch; nor would he wish to, for truly he believed in the Vulcan way. But perhaps he could express a little of the Human part of him; especially where his friendship for Jim was concerned. It wouldn't harm him to 'open up a little', as the Humans called it.

Peace of mind attained, Spock finally found he could resume meditation without further difficulty.

Kirk stepped out of his cabin and began to make his way along the corridor towards the turbolift. He was going on duty in a few minutes, and he fervently hoped that this shift was going to be a little more uneventful than the last few.

The business of the salt creature had shaken them all a little. Not perhaps the most dangerous encounter they had had with an alien life-form, yet it had had its effect. Poor McCoy; Kirk could understand only too well how Bones had hesitated in killing it. Wearing the face of his old love, it had come to McCoy for help, and he had been forced to kill it, loath as the good Doctor was to perform such an act. But he had done it to save his, Kirk's, life, and even so Kirk had an idea he was fretting in his quarters over the death of the real Nancy Crater, and his being taken in by the creature, and over having to kill the last of a species. Later on he would go and see McCoy, but for now it was best if he left him alone for a while.

The last of a species. He had referred to it as a 'Buffalo', but that wasn't truly what he'd been thinking about when Spock had asked him on the Bridge.

But to have told the truth then would only have embarrassed his friend, and Kirk had no wish to do that. No, he hadn't been thinking about the buffalo - he'd been thinking about how Spock had come bursting into McCoy's cabin to save them from the salt creature. Or, more specifically, to save *him*, since it was he the creature had been trying to kill. Kirk would never forget Spock's face when he saw what the alien was trying to do. Transfixed as he had been by the creature in its attempt to draw the salt from his body, he had still been able to witness Spock's actions, and he was glad of it.

In that moment of danger the Vulcan facade had dropped completely; Spock hadn't even thought about it as he had - yes, *yelled* at McCoy to kill it before it killed the Captain. Spock's innate reverence for all life forms hadn't needed logic to know that was the only answer; and Kirk was glad he had seen it. For surely he needed no further proof that Spock understood how special their friendship was.

For so long their friendship had remained an unspoken, yet still tangible thing, a treasure both of them knew existed, and guarded carefully, even though neither of them referred to it in more than oblique terms.

Mainly for the Vulcan's sake. Kirk hadn't wanted to push him, had known that Spock had to admit to his own feelings in his own time, or perhaps he never would admit them. And Kirk couldn't bear to think of Spock trapped within his own prison of non-emotion for the rest of his life.

Of course, Spock was Vulcan, and Kirk had never wanted to change that, or the way Spock was. He only wanted him to relax a little, for his own sake. His Vulcan friend was a unique person, and deserved the warmth friendship could bring.

And now it had happened. The salt creature had been the catalyst, but Kirk had seen for quite a while that Spock was beginning to accept the Human half of him with more ease than he had ever been able to before. Now he would have to be careful; more than ever he'd have to make sure he didn't push Spock at all, or he might just drive the Vulcan back into his shell. No, it was up to the Vulcan himself now. But how Kirk wished he could dare to say something about it first.

Before he reached the turbolift his resolution was to be put to the test. Naturally, with their duty shifts beginning at the same time, Spock was also on his way to the Bridge, and had caught up with the Captain. He wore his customary neutral expression.

"Good day, Captain," said the Vulcan. "I trust you slept well after yesterday's events?"

"Like a log, Spock," Kirk replied as they both stepped into the turbolift. "No ill effects. How 'bout you?"

"In good health. It was not I who was in danger, Jim," said the Vulcan.

So he wasn't avoiding the subject. Or was that just a non-committal Vulcan reply? It hadn't sounded exactly like it... had

it? Kirk forgot to order the turbolift to the Bridge. Oh damn - now he'd have to say something. At least thank him. Surely that couldn't do any harm?

"Spock - about yesterday. I haven't really thanked you for what you did. It would have killed me if you hadn't intervened. I know you don't thank logic, but..." Kirk deliberately left it open.

Spock took a deep breath. It was now or never. "Indeed. But perhaps my actions were not entirely motivated by logic." There, he had said it.

Kirk looked at him in open surprise and pleasure. "Then you'll accept my thanks?"

Spock nodded, fighting a terrible urge to smile. "For acting as any friend would? Gladly. And Jim - thank you for being my friend."

Kirk *did* smile. But he was completely speechless.

Their hours on the Bridge passed quickly and uneventfully. Spock felt strangely at ease with himself in quite a new way, and knew he had made the correct decision. He understood too that his open admission of their friendship had pleased Jim, and that could only be a good thing.

What Sarek would have said... Spock realised with quite a jolt that it didn't seem to matter quite so much any more. Of course he cared what his father's opinion of him was - and that too was surely an admission of emotion - but it no longer left him torn with guilt if he disagreed.

Jim had shown him that it wasn't wrong to care, and deep inside he knew that he had always known it.

The hours on the Bridge seemed to fly by, and at the end of their duty shift Kirk and Spock left the Bridge together, at ease, as always, in each other's company; but now there was an even greater understanding between them. It was clear to Spock that he should have taken this step a long time ago.

"I'm worried about McCoy," Kirk confided as Captain and First Officer made their way towards the galley. "He's been spending almost all his spare time on his own in his cabin these last few days. It isn't like Bones."

"I, too, have been thinking about the Doctor," Spock admitted, "and I agree it seems likely that he has taken the incident with the salt creature very hard. Jim, do you think that perhaps one of us ought to talk to him? Perhaps we could help."

Kirk looked at the Vulcan with a surprised smile. Of course Spock had always cared about McCoy as a friend, even if before he would never ever have made such an open admission. He suddenly understood that Spock's new openness wasn't completely an accident; Spock was trying very hard to unbend, as if he was trying to crack that hard, disciplined shell of Vulcan non-emotion a little more by conscious effort. It couldn't be easy for him, and Kirk suddenly also felt very proud of his friend. He had long respected Spock, but now that respect had grown even further.

"Spock... if you'd like to speak to him... then I'm sure he'd appreciate it. And Spock..." Kirk paused a moment, and smiled.

"Yes, Jim?"

"Don't change too much."

Hours later Spock was still pondering Jim's remark, but he thought he understood, and it gave him an inexplicable warm glow inside. Once he'd never have been able to see what Jim's words really meant, but would have taken them at their face value. Those days were long past; now he could see that what Jim meant was, although he approved of Spock being more relaxed and less the rigid, formal Vulcan, he felt it would be wrong if he changed too much, or just for the sake of it. It was all part of how Jim had always been towards him, accepting him the way he was, however he was. Yet Jim had still been working towards helping him in the direction he had taken. It was perhaps something of a paradox, but Spock *did* understand what Kirk meant - and he was deeply touched.

Now the opportunity had arisen for him to see McCoy without it looking as if he was deliberately interfering, for McCoy would certainly not like that. Perhaps he *was* interfering - but if it was ultimately for the Doctor's own good, then it was logical. It was going to be far more difficult for him to speak to McCoy on a less-than-formal basis. Spock's relationship with Jim had always been easy and natural in many ways, although it had taken the Vulcan a long while to admit that friendship openly. But now he had, and now he wasn't going to let the fact that his relationship with McCoy hadn't always been quite so easy stop him from attempting to help the Doctor.

And although Spock knew that most times McCoy's verbal barbs were aimed with the intention of getting him to be more Human, now Spock himself had taken that decision he felt oddly more vulnerable. He hoped McCoy wasn't going to be difficult. Though of course with the events of the last few days in mind, it would be quite understandable if he was. With determination, Spock went through the opening door into Sickbay.

McCoy was seated at his desk, apparently busy with some paperwork. On hearing the door, he turned his head. "Yes, Spock - what is it?"

Spock found it bothered him that McCoy automatically assumed he would only think of going there on business. *Did* he appear so cold to most Humans?

"I have come for the report on the salt creature, Doctor. The Captain has asked me to collect it."

Quite true, and part of his job. Perhaps mention of the creature struck too near McCoy's emotional wounds, but the subject had to be broached.

"It's here." McCoy took a tape from a drawer and handed it to the Vulcan. No remarks, no wisecracks - just a definite air of depression. "I finished it a while ago."

Spock took the tape. "Thank you, Doctor. Were your conclusions correct?" For one of the few times in his life Spock felt completely

at a loss for what to say. But it was clear McCoy had to be made to talk about it. He was too withdrawn, too controlled. For a Human, it was wrong.

"Seems to me it was you and Jim who got the answers," McCoy said with a trace of bitterness. "I was wrong all down the line."

"I would not say that, McCoy," Spock said as gently as he could. At last he had an opening. "Could you not have had one of your staff perform the autopsy?"

The look on McCoy's face was one of mild surprise, both at a suggestion of something that had never even occurred to him, and the fact that it was Spock making it. Not that he didn't know Spock kept a caring soul locked away beneath that Vulcan exterior, but to see him act that way... The Vulcan's concern got through McCoy's carefully constructed protective coldness.

"But I *hesitated*, Spock. You were right - it could have killed Jim. And I was so wrapped up with its looking like Nancy that I just stood there like an idiot! I'm a fool, Spock." McCoy sounded very unhappy. The Vulcan knew then that he had been right to come and try to talk to him.

"It was understandable," Spock said. "Do not torture yourself. I had the advantage of knowing the creature's true nature - you did not. There is nothing you should blame yourself for, McCoy."

The Doctor looked at Spock gratefully, even if he was a little bewildered by the Vulcan's open concern. Then he remembered how Spock had acted when he had burst into the cabin and seen the creature trying to kill Jim. Did that have anything to do with it? But he wouldn't joke about it; not now. Spock had clearly come here to try and help him, and he deserved more than that, although he was sure Spock had always seen through his attempts to get the Vulcan to open up, to the real respect and friendship that lay behind.

And he knew it couldn't be easy for Spock to come and talk to him like that. To Jim, maybe - but to him? Oh, Spock had helped him before, of course - but in an unobtrusive way so that he could always claim his actions were motivated 'purely by logic'. But this was different, and McCoy was touched, and very grateful.

"Spock - thank you for coming here," said McCoy, not knowing quite what to say and scared of saying anything that would send Spock back behind his Vulcan wall of non-emotion again. "It's appreciated, believe me. And... I'll be all right - really."

Spock nodded, and McCoy was sure there was a hint of a smile there.

"I am glad, McCoy," said the Vulcan. "And you should remember - friends are those who are there when you need to talk. If you need us, Jim and I will be there."

With that Spock left before McCoy could say another word.

Back in the peace and privacy of his quarters, Spock considered his exit from Sickbay. In truth it had almost been a flight, for he knew he had to leave before the situation had grown even more emotional. He was glad he had been able to help McCoy - or at least

he hoped he had achieved that - but he still found it extremely difficult to be even a little open emotionally. Perhaps he always would do - apart from all the years of training there was still that Vulcan half of him, the dominant half in many ways.

His experiences of the day had proved to him that his decision had been correct; and surely it was, after all, logical to allow the Human side of him to govern his actions, if only slightly, from time to time? And in all truth he was not certain if it was only the Human part of him. But he had no intention of changing greatly; he remembered Jim's remark again, and once again was more than grateful his friend understood. But Jim always had.

In any case, it had pleased Jim that he had been able to admit to their friendship openly, and that alone was worth it.

He did not have time now, for he was due back on the Bridge shortly, but later he intended to record his usual letter-tape to his mother. Perhaps now the content would be slightly different.

It would not be easy to do, but he had managed to let both Jim and McCoy know that he cared - surely Amanda deserved as much? It was ironic, but he doubted that he would ever have been able to admit as much to his own patient mother, if it had not been for Jim and McCoy - especially Jim. The letter would still not be easy for him, but he was determined at least to let Amanda know of the small change in him; he knew it would please her - more than that, perhaps it would go some way to put her mind at rest about the son she still worried about. Spock knew she still remembered the small child who had found such pain in his divided personality - it was right that he should let her know he now understood he needed both halves of himself, and acceptance of each. Perhaps one day even Sarek would understand.

The door buzzed, and he knew even before he called "Come!" that it was his Captain and friend. At one time he had never understood the small things about friendship; the small things that mattered. Like going on duty together. He knew he still had much to learn, and that as a Vulcan he was possibly unlikely ever to understand in exactly the same way as a Human. Indeed, he had no wish to be anything but Vulcan - only to be Spock.

"You coming?" asked Kirk.

Spock nodded and rose. "Yes, Captain. Jim, I spoke to McCoy. I believe the incident of the salt creature is no more than he can deal with. He is an extremely resilient individual."

Kirk looked rather surprised momentarily, yet he didn't know why. He had half-expected Spock would go and see Bones, especially after their conversation earlier. Perhaps the salt creature had done Spock a favour; he really did seem easier in himself in a way Kirk had always wanted to see.

"I'm glad you spoke to him," Kirk said, "and I expect he is, too."

The two officers left for the Bridge together, and their conversation returned to more everyday matters, the Captain and First Officer discussing the running of their ship.

As they left the turbolift and went to their posts none of the Bridge crew would have detected any change in the Vulcan. He was



still the same logical, efficient Science Officer. Spock himself knew that was true, and in many ways he would always be the same. It was right for him - and logical.

But in other ways he had taken the first steps towards being, perhaps, a little more tolerant of the Human part of himself. Perhaps, he thought as he saw Kirk sitting in his command chair signing a report, he had taken those first steps a long time ago.

## NORMAL PROCEDURES

You will find out too late,  
my mirror Spock,  
what my true intentions are.  
You suggest that I follow  
the normal procedure  
of the Empire  
by raining destruction  
upon innocent worlds,  
thinking that I am your Captain  
who has done such things before.  
But since I am the Kirk  
from the USS Enterprise  
I will act according to the procedure  
that is within my own universe.  
When you do eventually learn  
which Kirk I really am,  
perhaps then you will understand  
my actions  
towards you as well as this ship.  
And, relying on the calibre of man  
I know you to be,  
so much like my own Mr. Spock,  
you may even appreciate  
what I have done.

CarolMel Ambassador

# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

## *of the law-breaking kind*

by

Synda Surgenor

"I'm afraid we seem to be costumed a little out of step with the time, Spock," Jim says.

I have to agree with him. The people going about their business around us as we stand on the street corner wear clothing that is worn and shabby. Men and women alike wear head coverings and loose, almost shapeless outer garments in mainly dull greys and browns. Our bare heads and the blue and gold of our uniforms make us stand out like two sore thumbs - quite apart from my other obvious differences.

"I am going to be difficult to explain in any case, Captain," I reply.

He looks me up and down, his eyes finally coming to rest on my ears. "Well, Spock, if we can't disguise you, we'll just have to find *some* way of explaining you," he says.

*Some way of explaining me?*

"That should prove interesting," I tell him.

Very interesting. Even if one ignores my ears and skin colour, I should certainly like to hear his explanation for the fact that if cut I bleed green instead of red, not to mention my lack of blood pressure, and the different arrangement of my internal organs.

"Let's get out of here!" he says, pointing to an alleyway across the street.

Already we have attracted the attention of several people, and I am glad to move. As we cross the street a large, box-like, wheeled vehicle screeches to a halt a few feet from me, and its driver shouts angrily and incomprehensibly at me as I stop and stare at it, fascinated. Jim grasps my arm and drags me on, and the vehicle continues on its way, noisily. We arrive safely at the entrance to the alleyway, and Jim comes to a sudden halt.

"Look!"

Halfway along the alley a metal ladder leads up to a railed metal platform outside a partially open window. Clothing festoons the platform, obviously hung out to dry after washing.

A sudden chill grips me. He wouldn't - would he?

"Theft, Captain?" I inject disapproval into my voice, and allow it to show in my expression. After all, we are Starfleet officers and gentlemen, and I am a Vulcan; and whatever Humans may do,

Vulcans do not steal.

"We-ell..." He sees my disapproval and hesitates - but only for a moment. Then his expression changes and I know it is going to happen. "Well, Mr. Spock, we'll just have to steal from the rich and give back to the poor - some other time. Wait here."

He trots into the alleyway and goes up the ladder like a squirrel up a tree. He climbs onto the platform, and as though he has all the time in the world searches through the clothing for what he wants.

I can feel hundreds of eyes boring into my back - I shall never understand how criminals survive the strain. I look behind me and in either direction along the street, fully expecting to find a crowd gathering, and discover that no-one is taking the slightest notice of us. Incredible!

Having finished his choice of apparel for us, Jim starts down the ladder, and I move in to join him. Back on the ground, he bundles the clothing untidily against his chest, and grins at me like a mischievous small boy. It is obvious that he has begun to enjoy himself.

"I think I'm going to like this century, Spock," he says. "It's simple, easier to manage. We're not going to have any difficulty explaining..."

As he speaks my ears pick up a slight sound behind us - a footstep, the soft sound of cloth on cloth. We turn towards the street again, and although Jim is surprised to see the figure standing in the alleyway entrance, I am not. It is only what I have been expecting ever since we first set eyes on those clothes.

The figure is obviously an official of some kind. A tall, broadly built man, he is wearing a peaked cap and a dark uniform decorated with badges and brass buttons, and is carrying a long stick in one hand. He stands there, four-square in the centre of the entrance, and stares at us accusingly.

After a moment he says, "Well?" in a querying tone of voice.

Jim freezes in mid step, and his arms tighten on our ill-gotten gains. The less attention I draw to myself the better, so I decide to let him do the talking. After several seconds silence I begin to wonder if this is such a good idea. I glance at him just as he decides he had better say something.

"Ah!" he says - rather weakly, I think. "You're a policeman. I recognise the traditional accoutrements."

The... policeman... clasps his stick in both hands behind his back, and does not deign to answer. Jim has obviously not made a very good beginning. Having elicited no response, he turns his head in my direction. His face is developing an expression of desperation.

At this point something occurs which happens only very rarely. My Human half surges up from its normal subordinate position and takes control of my tongue and actions, while my Vulcan half sits back and allows it to do so. Wearing my most innocent expression, I stare calmly back at him and say blandly,

"You were saying you'd have no trouble explaining, Captain."

He is not pleased. He glares at me, then turns his attention quickly back to the policeman, who glanced at me when I spoke but who is once again staring grimly at the stolen clothing. Having noticed that glance, Jim unfortunately lets his mouth run away with him.

"Er... my friend... is obviously Chinese," he says somewhat desperately.

Until this moment I had believed that Jim Kirk's reputation for being able to talk his way out of almost anything was well deserved. Now I have my doubts. In this situation so far he is not doing at all well. In fact, that remark has the unwanted effect of making the policeman look at me again, and this time with more attention than before. Once again Jim's mouth goes into action ahead of his brain.

"I see you have noticed the ears," he says. "Uh... they're actually easy to explain..." At which point he realizes that they are *not* easy to explain, and that he has not the faintest idea how to continue. His face goes blank, and his eyes develop a slightly glazed expression. I take pity on him. After all, it is me he is getting into trouble.

"Perhaps the unfortunate accident I had as a child?" I suggest.

"Ah! Yes. The unfortunate accident he had as a child," he repeats. As he speaks I can almost hear his brain slip into gear and begin to build up speed. Perhaps his reputation as a fast talker is not entirely lost? "Er... he caught his head in a... er... mechanical rice picker..."

*Mechanical rice picker?* I stare at him, so startled that for once my expression reflects my feelings. I cannot believe my ears.

"Fortunately," he continues, warming to this idea that has infected his brain, "there was an American missionary living nearby who happened to be a skilled plastic surgeon in civilian life, and he..."

Luckily for my peace of mind (forget my ears: they will never be the same) at this moment the policeman decides he has heard enough. He moves towards us with determination.

"All right! All right!" he says sharply. "Drop those bundles and put your hands against the wall."

Jim opens his arms and the clothing drops to the ground in an untidy heap. He looks at me despairingly as we turn slowly and reluctantly towards the nearby wall. It is obvious the policeman is about to search us, and when he does so he will find our phasers and communicators, which will no doubt be the source of considerable interest. There is also the tricorder I am carrying, and what is equally important from my point of view, a search will bring him much too close for comfort to my person. Unless he is blind and/or stupid - which I doubt - he is certain to notice at least some of my physical differences. Therefore, it is obvious to both Jim and myself that we cannot allow ourselves to be searched. But how to prevent it?

The policeman grasps my arm and shoves me into position against the wall. He does the same to Jim and begins to pat his way down his body. For the first time in this whole affair, at this moment Jim

reverts to his normal, quick-thinking self.

"Oh, how careless of your wife to let you go out like that!" he exclaims, turning his head and staring at the shoulder of the policeman's uniform jacket.

The man ceases patting him and attempts to see what Jim is looking at.

I turn quickly. "Yes, it's quite untidy - here, let me help you," I say, and stretching out my hand I press my fingers to the sensitive spot at the juncture of neck and shoulder. The policeman sags, unconscious, and I ease him to the ground.

Jim grins at me and says, "Well done, Spock!"

There is a murmur of voices from the entrance to the alleyway. A quick glance over my shoulder shows me that which I have dreaded for some time - a growing crowd of interested spectators. I catch Jim's eye and give a small jerk of my head towards the street.

"I see them, Spock," he says softly. Quickly he gathers up the dropped clothing and nods towards the opposite end of the alleyway. "Let's get out of here!"

We move off, Jim leading the way. Just before we break into a run another glance over my shoulder shows me one of the spectators beginning to move slowly towards the fallen policeman, who is already beginning to stir. It was a very mild neck pinch I gave him.

We run around a sharp left-hand turn in the alley, and a few more strides bring us out onto another street, so similar to the original one as to be almost indistinguishable from it. We continue to run, winding our way amongst the pedestrians. Some stare at us, others take no notice at all, apparently too steeped in their own worries to have any interest to spare for two bizarrely dressed individuals running in their midst - even if one of those individuals does have greenish-tinted skin and pointed ears. Their lack of curiosity is to our advantage, of course, but it is most strange.

Behind us several loud whistle blasts reverberate through the air. Pursuit is at last on its way.

Jim skids to a halt at the entrance to another alleyway, mutters, "This way!" and dives between its high brick walls.

I follow. His sharp eyes have seen a chance of sanctuary, a flight of steps leading down to a door, apparently to a cellar. He flings himself down them and thuds up against the door, frantically turning the handle. The door swings open and we both almost fall inside - just in time. As I shut the door behind us my ears catch the sound of several pairs of feet rushing by on the street. I hope no-one has seen us coming in here.

We are in a cellar, dimly lighted, dirty, dusty, festooned with cobwebs and cluttered with packing cases and some ancient items of furniture. In one corner a solid fuel burning stove glows hotly, in the centre of the opposite wall a flight of wooden stairs leads up to an interior door.

Jim prowls about, searching, checking. After a few moments he dumps the stolen clothes on top of a packing case with a sigh of relief. "I think this'll do, Spock. We can change here."

"Indeed, Captain."

I walk across to join him, and am met by a very strange look, the kind I believe is known as 'old-fashioned'. He raises one eyebrow at me.

"Mr. Spock, I think you were actually enjoying my predicament back there. At times you seem quite Human!"

Enjoying myself? Of course I was enjoying myself! But there is no way I am going to admit that to anyone other than myself. When one is Vulcan - or even half Vulcan - opportunities for simple enjoyment do not often arise. We Vulcans are solemn creatures - there is no logic in laughter. But when my Human half takes over, and the opportunity presents itself, I can enjoy myself as well as the next man. The sight of my Captain - James T. Kirk, the pride of Starfleet - lost for words and inserting both feet in his mouth every time he opened it was too good - and too rare - a chance to miss. Even for a half-Vulcan!

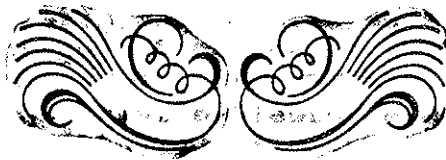
But the fun is over now. We have serious business here. Our search for Dr. McCoy *must* succeed if history is not to be altered. It is time to revert to normal.

Inwardly I sigh, and once again bury the Human Spock deep within and let the Vulcan rise to the surface. I don my best stone face, and look Jim straight in the eye.

"Captain, I hardly think insults are within your prerogative as my commanding officer."

He raises his other eyebrow to join the first. "Of course. I'm... sorry, Spock."

He always has seen right through me.



IOTIA -

TOO MUCH OF THE ACTION!

Another sickening lurch and a further affront  
To the Vulcan's dignified mien.  
Kirk grins, proud of his latest stunt,  
Spock does not *quite* mutter something obscene.

"I could get to like this," is Kirk's retort.  
"Illogical to assume you'll ever be hired.  
In Starship command you'll never fall short,  
In a taxi you leave much to be desired."



Linda Spencer

# The Hand of Friendship

by

Brenda Kelsey

McCoy sat in his office and stared at Spock in open-mouthed disbelief. He thought that he had concealed his emotional turmoil so cleverly and here was Spock - Spock of all people! - asking in that all-too-superior way if there was anything wrong; if there was anything he could do to help. What did he know about anything? McCoy shuffled the notes on his desk, unwilling to meet Spock's neutral gaze.

"What makes you think there's something wrong? Don't tell me, a *feeling*?"

"I would not tell you what you obviously know so well."

"Hah!"

"Doctor, you have been behaving atypically."

"You are being ridiculous."

"Am I? I do not think so."

"There is nothing wrong."

"There *is* something wrong. You have changed. Only in little ways, yet cumulatively the effect is glaringly obvious, once noticed."

"To any student of Human behaviour," McCoy muttered.

"Precisely."

"What?"

"In my attempts to survive among Humans, I have been forced to study the behaviour patterns considered normal for your species. You have deviated from your normal pattern."

"Utter nonsense."

"My observations are accurate."

"Please leave."

"I cannot obey your request. The matter is too important. Nobody else has noticed yet, but they will. I remind you that you are part of a very limited community. Your behaviour has not been normal. An examination of the report of our sojourn on Murasaki 312 will show marked differences to your normal pattern. And it will be noticed that you are consciously avoiding Captain Kirk. You have been for the past four days, to a far greater extent than you were prior to our excursion."

McCoy's hands clenched around a tape. "Has he noticed?" The question was asked automatically, effectively trapping McCoy.

"I think not, else he would be here, not I."

"Do you intend to tell him?"

"So you do admit that you are avoiding him."

"Damn you! Why can't you mind your own business?"

"Anything which affects the smooth running of this ship is my business. Anything which is or can be a threat to the personnel aboard."

"So now you think I'm a threat?" interrupted McCoy.

"Possibly," concluded Spock calmly. "You are in a position of great trust. You are the Chief Medical Officer, and as such no-one aboard would question your judgements."

"Do you think I'd let this affect how I treat him?" interrupted McCoy again.

"Then the cause lies only between yourself and Captain Kirk?"

McCoy stalked round the desk, rage building up inside him, to face his tormentor. "For the last time, Commander - *leave it and me alone!*"

His anger was such that he did not notice Spock's tightly controlled reactions to his emotions, the faint tremors in the arms or the paling of already bleached flesh that screamed the force and the impact the sensations were having on the emotionally sensitive Vulcan. Tired, strained, confused by the capriciousness of the Human he was confronting, Spock attempted to calm him.

"I only wish to help. I do not come to comment, or pass judgement on you or on its cause. I only wish to know if there is anything I can do to alleviate your problem."

Spock's speech proved to be far from soothing. McCoy exploded at him.

"My problem. What the hell would you know about it? About anything *Human*?"

"Very little, nor shall I unless you choose to tell me."

"You obviously expect me to tell you..." The question died away, then McCoy laughed mirthlessly. "You do, you really do. Of all the overwhelmingly conceited, insensitive things you've ever said or done, this has to be the prize winner."

"I only wish to help you."

"You can help me by leaving - *now!*"

"Please, Doctor, tell me what it is that troubles you."

"Not a chance. Hell would freeze over first."

McCoy snarled at him and swung away from Spock. In his blind



anger he misjudged distance and stumbled, off balance, as he collided with a chair. Spock's reactions, much faster than Human, enabled him to grab the man before he could hit the desk. He supported McCoy until he could regain his footing.

The sudden and unexpected contact destroyed the already weakened shielding that served to protect him from the raw emotions always emanating from Humans. A torment of grief, despair and anger flooded through him, sending his mind reeling and causing him to maintain his grip on McCoy for a few seconds longer that he would otherwise have done.

McCoy, shaken by the almost-accident, misinterpreted Spock's failure to release him and panicked in an uncharacteristically violent fashion. Lashing out at the emotion-torn Vulcan, he landed a surprisingly powerful back-hand blow across Spock's face, staggering him and causing him to let go of his grip. McCoy finished turning to find Spock half slumped across his desk.

"Don't you dare! Do you think that I don't know you can read minds? Do you think I'd let you fool me that easy? I don't want you poking around in my mind. Take your perverted curiosity somewhere else. Jim may enjoy it, but not me. And keep out of my way. Help? You help me? Hah, that really *would* be the day that I'll need help from the likes of you! Stay away from me, you hear? Don't interfere in what you can't understand." He stormed out of his office.

Spock slowly shifted his balance and sank into the chair that had caused McCoy to trip. He blinked, shook his head slowly, carefully. He was dazed by the combination of emotion, physical violence and verbal abuse. He stayed there, head sunk into his arms, heedless of the voices in the outer office; and of the blood which slowly soaked his uniform and spread across the desk top.

McCoy hurtled into his quarters and headed for his drinks cabinet. He grabbed a bottle at random, spilled an over-generous measure into a glass and drank deeply. He breathed raggedly, leaning against the low cupboard to stay upright.

Gradually his breathing slowed and his rocketing pulse rate steadied down. He turned, surveying his almost barren quarters, musing on the short while he had occupied them. He had enjoyed his stay on the Enterprise, the people aboard had been good to know. Scotty and the engineers were convivial drinking companions; some of the women aboard... well, they hadn't proved impervious to Southern charm; and Jim.

Ah yes, Jim. Tomorrow he'd have to face Jim and ask for a transfer off the Enterprise. That was going to be tricky. Jim could be stubborn, especially if something was going on and no-one told him about it.

And if he was told about it? McCoy's mind shied away from completing the thought. His Captain was all-too-ready to take the blame for every mischance and problem on board. His burden of guilt was too high and broad to bear already. There was no way that his load was going to be added to.

McCoy managed to smile. James T. Kirk, certified hero, and one of the three loneliest men on board, the others being himself and... Spock. He swallowed the dregs in the glass and quickly poured

himself another.

Spock. What if *he* went to Kirk? What could he tell him? He obviously knew nothing of what had happened.

Kirk was still safe, and he'd have his Vulcan there still to fill up the hours between duty shifts and sleep after he'd gone. He remembered his panic in his office. What had he yelled at Spock? He couldn't remember clearly, just pushing Spock away and screaming at him. Oh well, it couldn't have been too bad. What can you say to hurt when there's no emotion? His shoulders slumped. That old familiar lie. Of course Spock had emotions. If he didn't have then he wouldn't need to control them. The logic would be perfect and there'd be no openings for the teasing.

Only of late the teasing had taken on a vicious edge, cutting through the defences to score hit after hit on the Vulcan's soul. He'd seen them going home, all the barbed cruelties, the poisoned branches of friendship flaying the Vulcan bare before the others. Murasaki 312 had been a nightmare for everyone, but his actions while on the landing party, the things that he had said and allowed to be said. Spock's own personal and private hell, burning up in a shuttle after that last, glorious gamble. And he'd been right there, twisting the screws. And later on the Bridge, prodding Jim into leading the chorus for another round of Spock-baiting. And he had never once retaliated. Just took it all with a raised eyebrow. And tonight he'd come to the Sickbay!

McCoy abruptly felt sick; the alcohol hit his empty stomach and the cabin whirled as if the gravity had been cut. He made it to the bed, knowing that he was almost drunk. Drunk on two glasses? He giggled stupidly. *What have I been drinking?* He raised the bottle still tightly clasped in his left hand to read the label. *Umm, 25-year-old Scotch whisky.*

He put the bottle down on the floor, his hand reluctantly freeing itself from the glass. *I'm all sticky. Must have spilt some. What a waste.*

He licked at his fingers and was instantly sober. The taste wasn't whisky. It was blood. He looked at his hand. Red oozing from several splits across his knuckles had streaked through... green. *Green - SPOCK!*

He had no memory of leaving his quarters but he found himself at Spock's door pressing the entry call repeatedly. When he got no answer he flipped open the entry pad and keyed in the medical override sequence which allowed him entry to all parts of the Enterprise.

Spock's quarters were dimly lit, the office area stark and bare, the sleeping area heavily draped in thick red curtains and lit by a flickering pot which McCoy vaguely realised contained a real flame. It was his first visit to the Vulcan's quarters, but it was a fleeting one; when the small bathroom proved as empty as the other two rooms McCoy left and headed back to the Sickbay at a dead run.

He jerked to a stop outside the main entrance, then walked calmly in. Tamura was talking to two other nurses and a small selection of security guards. He managed a cheery grin.

"What's all this, then? Have they closed the rec rooms?"

Herb Bind, the second of the ship's dentistry specialist, grinned. "No, Boss."

"No? So why the gathering? You can't all be waiting to see me."

The laughter that caused was general.

Tamura explained. "Herb and I are on duty, everyone else has just come back from shore leave and they called in to see us." She paused, suddenly remembering Christine Chapel's sarcastic remarks about non-essential visitors in Sickbay.

It was McCoy's turn to laugh. He'd had several toe-to-toe exchanges with his senior nurse on various aspects of Sickbay procedure. She was a very fine nurse, and a dedicated and brilliant scientist; it was just that sometimes she interpreted the rules too literally for McCoy's taste. He wanted people to drop into Sickbay to chat. It was the perfect way of keeping an eye and ear on the general health of the ship, and went a long way to dispel the still common antipathy of the normal healthy being towards doctors and hospitals. He wanted people to be relaxed when they dropped in for a friendly chat or a cup of coffee. It took the sting out of unfamiliar surroundings when they had to be there as patients. Besides, he heard more rumours in Sickbay than the rest of the Bridge crew put together, except for Spock, and he had two unfair advantages - one each side of his head.

"Yeah, well, if you don't tell Chris, I won't."

Herb ventured to tease his section chief. "Does she nag you too?"

McCoy stiffened theatrically. "Nurse Chapel and I have long and meaningful discussions on a wide range of subjects."

The Security contingent hooted, Carla Issacs calling out, "You mean she has long and meaningful monologues on a wide range of subjects."

"Less of your cheek, young lady, or I'll stop you being issued with hangover cures."

A selection of catcalls and hisses were his reward for that threat.

"All right, seriously now, how's business?"

"Nothing, Boss. Not even a toothache," replied Herb, feigning misery.

"In that case you and Tamura can take callers and you can all remove to the rec room. I'm not sleepy tonight, so I might as well put my insomnia to some good use."

"That's very good of you, Dr. McCoy."

"Good nothing. Just be back 30 minutes before the shift changes looking suitably rumpled so that the handover looks normal. Now scat, all of you. Go on." And he herded the bunch out of the door to a chorus of clucks and baas.

Tamura was the last to go. "Are you sure you wouldn't like some

company? You don't look too hot."

"I'm fine. You run along. Just remember to get back here to cover me."

"We will."

The door had barely closed before McCoy was in his office checking the slouched figure bent across his desk. The Vulcan stirred in response to the pain caused by McCoy's gentle probing.

"Stay still, Spock."

"McCoy?" The word was a mumbled question.

"Yeah, it's me."

"I think that I am going to be sick."

"Don't move. Just breathe deeply. I'll get a basin."

He did and Spock retched miserably, leaning weakly against the doctor as the spasms shook him. They finally eased into dry heaves and McCoy cautiously eased him upright, wiping his face and mouth clean and seeing for the first time the damage he had inflicted.

"Oh God, I'm sorry."

"You are not to blame."

"I tend to disagree, but we'll save the argument 'til you're in better condition; will you let me treat that, or would you prefer me to get M'Benga?"

Spock raised a painful head to gaze at him from his one good eye. "The fewer involved in this fiasco the better."

McCoy swallowed hard. "Whatever. Can you... Do you think you could make it into the private ward if I helped you?"

"The nurses?"

"Are in the rec room. I know I don't act like I've got much sense, but I do use my brain sometimes."

Spock was sagging by the time they had covered the short distance to the small ward. When McCoy leaned against the bed and tipped him flat the sudden change in alignment spun his inner ear, causing vertigo.

He regained partial control a little while later to find he had been covered by warm blankets. McCoy re-entered the room as he was struggling to sit up.

"Oh no you don't. That face needs treatment, and it's easier for me to do it while you're flat. You'll be glad to hear that I failed to break your jaw or any of your teeth. Your eye is closed because of the swellings from the bruising, but your sight isn't in any danger. Once the swelling goes down you'll be able to see fine. The sickness and weakness are due to shock. Do you feel sick now?"

"No."

"Good. I bet your head's aching, though."

"It is controllable." Spock's speech was slightly slurred.

"Yeah, but this will help." The hypo hissed against his arm and he slid into a comfortable drugged darkness.

"That'll hold you for a while." McCoy scurried back into his office, mopped up the blood from his desk, then taking a small sample from the bowl he tipped the rest of the contents and the mopped waste into the disposal unit, slipped the bowl into the steriliser and the sample into the analyser, then dashed back into the ward to check the diagnostic panel. He stood looking at the readings.

"Okay," he said to the unconscious man, "that's cleaned up my office. Now it's your turn." He left, collected a steralite field and his operating kit, and returned.

When McCoy had finished the operation the facial swelling had been reduced and the cuts both inside and out of the cheek had been sealed with medi-skin. He carefully placed a dressing over Spock's left eye. He had checked and rechecked his patient, and was relieved to find that the injuries he had inflicted were, although spectacular, relatively minor. The readings had settled to near normal levels, but McCoy noted that Spock's blood pressure was showing the loss. He removed the steralite field and the instruments, swearing as he wrestled the container back into the storage compartment for automatic cleansing and recharging, then carefully restored the surgical instruments to their rightful places in the sterilising cabinet. He snatched the written report from the analyser and flipped all indicators to neutral. The sample followed the rest into the destructor. Breathing hard, he withdrew half a litre of Spock's blood from the storage area, picked up a transfusion unit and once again sped back into Spock's room.

He had the transfusion unit ready for connection to Spock when he realised that the Vulcan was still wearing his bloodstained uniform. His curses, rich and ripe, exploded round the room as he exited yet again to find cutters and cleansing cloths.

Finally, with the transfusion unit fixed firmly to Spock's left arm, the ruined uniform and undershirt, in various pieces, were flung into the destructor and the cutters went back into their allotted place. McCoy's temper was flaring as he bent over his patient to clean the dried blood from his arms and chest. His mutterings grew louder as he wiped the seemingly endless stains.

"Damned fool! Why didn't you mind your own business? For the good of the ship... Hah! Just plain nosey, that's what you are. That insatiable curiosity of yours. Poking your nose in where it wasn't welcome. Now you've ruined everything. I'd have left soon enough. I didn't think I could have hidden it from him for long, so I was going. He wouldn't have known. Why did you have to interfere? Damn you, *why?*"

His voice, and perhaps the less than gentle clean up, roused Spock slightly. Still not fully conscious, the demanding tone of voice penetrated, and he stirred and mumbled a reply.

McCoy, curious despite his anger, leaned closer. "I can't hear you. Say it again."

"I had to," came the reply.

Puzzled, McCoy pressed his advantage. "Why did you have to?" The feeling of glee vanished with Spock's reply.

"Had to. Couldn't lose you."

"Lose me?" asked McCoy, puzzled.

"Hmm." The sound was agreement, and the Vulcan slid back into oblivion.

"Why didn't you want to lose me? Answer me."

The Vulcan roused slightly. "Need McCoy. Need Jim. So lonely..." The last word was a sigh.

"Lonely? You've got your work, haven't you?" McCoy's anger flared again in a last attempt to protect his crumbling ego.

"Can't work all the time. So many hours to fill." The low voice held an infinite sadness that splintered McCoy's anger.

"You've got Jim. He's your friend."

"I think so." The reply was hesitant, confiding. "Never had a friend before. Not allowed."

"And McCoy - what do you think about him?" McCoy found he needed to know that answer very badly.

"Kind... gentle."

"Not all the time." He found he was close to tears.

"No, he hurts sometimes, says things to hide the pain. He's hurt again. Must help, have to try." The voice trailed away into silence.

"Why do you have to?" The question was asked urgently, rousing the sleeper again. The reply was simple.

"He nags me. No-one's ever cared enough to nag me."

McCoy found himself shaking his head, trying to deny the transparent honesty of the drug-induced truth. He covered Spock with the blankets and concentrated on soothing the now restless man back to sleep, an easy enough task aided by the still potent tranquilliser.

Mechanically he collected the soiled material and walked back into the main ward, used the destructor automatically and stood gazing around him, wondering what to do next. He reviewed his actions; the only thing he hadn't done was read the sample analysis, and that was on the ledge beside Spock. He went back to the private ward, drew up a chair and sat beside Spock, wearily looking at the report.

*Very little food content. You can't have eaten anything in the past 36-40 hours. I should have noticed. Too busy baiting you and avoiding Jim. Some blood. Hell, there are no signs of internal injuries. I only hit your face, not your gut. Could be you swallowed some from the cuts inside your mouth. Chemistry showing expected signs of bodily trauma. Nothing extraordinary. Except the cause.*

He shifted, twitching the blankets a little higher, noting the signals registering on the panel that showed that Spock was sliding gently from drugged to normal sleep. He chewed his lip as he pondered Spock's words. He felt astonishingly guilty about forcing those revelations from the man, but in all truth nothing had been revealed that he had not suspected - except...

Never had anyone to nag him before? He thinks that I'm kind to do that for him? I wasn't doing it because I cared. I was doing it because... McCoy sat in the brightly lit ward next to the alien he had baited so mercilessly, took out his soul and looked at it.

Kind? Me? It's all an act. I stopped caring years ago. No I didn't. I still care. I care so much that it scares me. If you care you get hurt. I cared about Sarah. I cared about Jo. I cared about Roy.

Now I care about Jim. Spock? Do I care about you? He looked at the still figure, sleek hair tousled now, elegant despite the depth of his sleep, the winged eyebrows now hidden by the dressing, the bony nose. McCoy smiled. Hey, I hadn't noticed. You've got a bony nose. Laughter bubbled inside him. All those months and I never noticed. I've only just started looking at you, not that wonderful illusion you project. You're a handsome man, Mr. Spock, by any Human standards. How do they judge you on Vulcan, I wonder? Do they think that you're clever and sophisticated?

Damn you, I do care about you. Now I've hurt you. On top of all the other hurts you've had to hide. How old are you? I can't remember.. You think Jim is your friend? Don't you know? Not allowed to have friends? I can't imagine a world where you're not allowed to have friends. Where you can't laugh or cry, can't admit that you're lonely. Did you know you were lonely, or was that something else Jim taught you? I guess he taught you how to care, too. That's why you were here tonight. You found out that you could care, that you wanted to help. Me. You came here to try to help me. You didn't know how, or even if you could, but you came anyway. You're really quite something, Spock.

And so am I. Leonard McCoy, champion of emotion. I showed emotions tonight, didn't I? Anger, fear, hatred. No wonder you do your best to deny you have them. Nobody in their right mind could feel proud of that mish-mash. And then to add injury to insult, I hauled off and belted you. Yeah, the good old healing hand can hurt as well as heal.

He looked at his swollen knuckles and flexed the fingers. My grandpappy would be proud of his grandson's fighting spirit. I can just imagine what he'd say if he was here now.

"You hit a Vulcan. Boy, that was brave. How did you manage to pluck up the courage to do that?"

"Simple, Grandpa. He was standing trying to figure out how to help me, so I hit him."

McCoy froze. The full consequences of his actions cascaded into his consciousness for the first time. I hit him. He's my senior officer. Second in command. I've assaulted a senior officer. That means questions, a court martial. They'll want to know why, Spock, and you'll have to tell them, admit you were trying to help a friend. And they'll ask me why I needed help. What do I say? I can't tell them. It would be horrible to have to stand up in a

crowded court and say... And it would be crowded. All the vultures there, the watchers like the women who took knitting to the foot of the guillotine, waiting for the downfall of the gods of the Enterprise. And we'd all go down.

I'd drag you and Jim with me if I talk. If I say that I lost my temper that'll mean that you provoked me somehow. They'll judge you, too. If they think it was intentional then you'll be grounded; and if it was unintentional... they'll say that you shouldn't have been left as the only alien aboard the Enterprise, and move you. They might even ground you, or maybe transfer you aboard the Intrepid. God, what would that do to you? I can't say that I lost my temper. You'll be punished. Stay silent. Don't answer any questions. Then they might think I'm staying silent to protect you. Whatever I do, you'll lose.

What do I do now? Whatever I do, I've ruined you. I only wanted to protect Jim. Now I'll hurt him worse. Oh, damn! What can I do?

McCoy crouched beside the bed, head on forearms, and sobbed. The rage was gone, grief and shame were all that was left. The tears finally ceased, but he stayed, bowed beside the bed, not daring to think, just waiting for the end of his world.

A gentle hand rested on his head.. "Doctor?"

"How do you feel, Spock?"

"Bruised."

"I'm sorry."

"There is no need to apologise to me, Doctor. The blame is entirely mine."

"Yours? I hit you."

"Because I provoked you. I acted in an unforgivable manner. I intruded upon your privacy. I presumed upon..."

"Friendship?" McCoy raised a tear-stained, blotchy face; red-rimmed eyes gazed at one of bloodshot green. "We might as well admit it, though what good is it going to do you? Guess I made a right mess of everything, including your face."

"A minor matter."

"The officers at my court martial may not think so. I am sorry."

"I think you've already said that, and I have disagreed with the necessity." Spock leaned back against the pillow and McCoy checked the diagnostic panel.

"Just relax, the anaesthetic is bound to make you a bit groggy."

"That is the least of our problems."

"Yeah, I guess so. Spock, what are we going to tell Jim?"

"I don't know. Nothing remotely like this has ever happened to me before."



"Me neither."

"That makes it the first time for all of us." Kirk was leaning against the door frame watching them.

"Jim, I..."

"Captain?"

Both were silenced by Kirk's almost violent hand gesture. "You'll both be glad to hear that Commissioner Ferris and the vaccine are now safely embarked and on their way to the New Paris Colony. I have a headache, so I came down here to get some painkillers. Looks like I got some more headache instead."

McCoy, pale faced, got to his feet. "If you will allow me to explain, sir."

"You don't have any choice, Doctor. Neither of you do," roared Kirk.

"Fine. If you'll come through to my office..."

"Here."

"Spock is in no condition..."

"The blame is entirely mine, Captain." Spock attempted to sit up.

"Lie down, you fool." McCoy leaned gently on Spock's shoulders, forcing him flat onto the bed. "And stay down, please."

Kirk watched the pair wearily. They both looked ill. Spock's left profile was heavily discoloured, the eye hidden by a medical patch. McCoy's face was ashen and blotchy from tears.

"I need answers. Was anyone else involved in this?"

"Not directly," said McCoy.

"Just once I'd like a straight answer. Who else was present?"

"Just us."

"Does anyone else know?"

"No, sir."

"I am duly thankful for small mercies. Do you think I could have those headache pills before we carry on?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good. I'll get some coffee - if it's safe to leave you, that is."

McCoy coloured painfully as Spock, in a deceptively normal voice, asked, "I would prefer fruit juice, if possible."

Kirk flinched at the hidden reproof. "Coffee and juice it is."

McCoy got the painkillers and was carefully adjusting the bed to

raise Spock's head and shoulders to a more comfortable position when Kirk returned with insulated jugs and beakers.

"Sickbay's deserted. Where are your staff?"

"In the rec room. They have callers if there are any problems. My responsibility, sir."

"That wasn't intended as a criticism, just a question."

"Sorry." McCoy poured juice for Spock, who sipped it cautiously, savouring the way it eased his drug-induced thirst.

Kirk exchanged a cup of coffee for the headache pills, which he swallowed thankfully. He retrieved a chair and sat down heavily.

"First things first. What's the damage?"

McCoy swallowed his own pills. "Lacerations internally and externally to the left cheek; bruising; swelling caused pressure which I've relieved and reduced. The..."

"Wait. You relieved and reduced. You mean *you* operated on him?"

"Why shouldn't he, Captain? I trust his judgement."

Kirk glared at Spock. "He caused it!"

"What's that got to do with it?" Spock sounded surprised.

"I think we'll shelve that for a while. Carry on, McCoy."

"Well, I covered his eye to stop him using it - it's best not to risk straining it. The blood transfusion is to replace what he lost and to counteract shock. It should be finished in about ten minutes. No permanent damage, no scars."

"And you did it?"

"The fault is mine, Captain," supplied Spock before McCoy could respond.

"I suppose McCoy held out his fist just so and you threw yourself at it? I take it you *did* use your fists?"

"Only one." McCoy held out his left hand, the cuts showing clearly despite the new medi-skin.

"So I can take it as an established fact that you did hit Spock?"

"Yes, sir."

"So tell me why."

He watched stonily as McCoy studied his damaged hand and Spock the ceiling.

"I hit Commander Spock. The whole mess is my fault and I accept full responsibility."

"Inaccurate. I caused the incident by provoking Dr. McCoy. The

fault, and the responsibility, are mine."

"Nice. Oh, well done, both of you. The 'blame-me-not-him' routine. Not good enough." Kirk's voice stayed low and calm. "I can't permit fighting aboard this ship, especially not between two senior officers. You have both admitted liability. Now what am I supposed to do? Forget this? Regulations say that I've got to arrange proceedings against you. *Both!*"

McCoy breathed a horrified, "NO!"

"No? So convince me why I shouldn't. Facts, gentlemen. In your own time." He leaned back in his chair, sipping coffee and pretending that his guts weren't tied in knots.

Spock, swallowing convulsively, gazed at his Captain in bleak misery. McCoy closed his eyes, trying frantically to think of some way of saving Spock from court martial.

Kirk sipped coffee for a long five minutes, then said, "Has this got anything to do with why you've been avoiding me, McCoy?"

Spock swallowed once then lay quite still. McCoy managed to look terrified.

Kirk grinned at them tightly. "Gotcha! Well, are you going to tell me about it?"

"I didn't realise that you'd noticed."

"I wanted to get rid of Ferris before I started trying to corner you. Which reminds me. What the hell were you playing at on Murasaki 312? Your duty was to help Spock. He was in command. You did everything you could to insult and belittle him. The only thing that stopped me having you court martialled there and then was because it would have looked damned bad on Spock's record. First independent command and the entire complement is charged with mutinous behaviour."

"Captain..."

"Be quiet, Spock." The words were spoken kindly. "You know it's true, even if you haven't requested action to be taken against them. I know you blame yourself for that incident, but your behaviour is above reproach. Not so the others. They have got off very lightly, very very lightly because you deserved to be protected. Now you didn't say anything, but that didn't stop me using my eyes and ears or my brain. Just so you know. Scott has received a strong verbal warning. Mears has been reprimanded and Boma has been grounded as unfit for duty with non-same-race personnel. That leaves you, McCoy. You were second in command. Your behaviour on that trip demands explanation as much as your behaviour now."

"And if I don't give you one?"

"Then you'll leave me no choice. My report will show that you are not fit for duty as a medical officer with non-Human personnel."

"No! That would destroy his career."

"Better his than yours, Spock. What about it, McCoy?"

McCoy shook his head sadly, defiantly. *Better mine than both of yours*, he thought sadly.

"As you wish, Doctor. As of this moment you may consider yourself re..."

"Wait. Please, Jim," Spock interrupted his Captain, a thing he did so rarely that the very fact he had done so startled Kirk.

"Spock, he hasn't left me any option."

"Deliberately so. He is trying to protect both of us from something which he thinks will harm us. In my case, it is the possible effect on me of a court martial, his or my own. I am unsure what he is trying to protect you from."

The long speech exhausted Spock, but had the effect he wished. Kirk nodded.

"Agreed. My apologies, Spock. I let my anger over these incidents cloud my judgement. I want to know, McCoy."

"Leave it, Jim. Court martial me and forget it," pleaded McCoy.

"I can't do that without court martialling Spock."

"Captain, Dr. McCoy was avoiding you *before* Murasaki 312. I believe he started soon after we left the Shore Leave Planet."

"Shut up, Spock!" McCoy lurched towards the bed, dropping the half filled beaker. "Shut up!"

Kirk grabbed him and slammed him against the wall. "Or you'll do what, Doctor? Hit him again?"

Pinned against the wall by his furious Captain, cornered by Spock's words, the fight drained out of McCoy and he slumped into Kirk's arms. Kirk sat him down.

"You're trying to protect me?"

"Yes."

"From what?"

"Me. My past."

"I don't understand."

"I'd much rather you never did."

"Surely it's not that bad?"

"Wanna bet?" muttered McCoy.

"If I may interrupt, the transfusion has finished. If you will remove the casing from my arm I will go to my quarters."

McCoy looked at Kirk for permission before he walked round the bed and lifted the unit from Spock. The needles had withdrawn automatically once the blood reservoir had been emptied, and McCoy simply had to check that the wounds were not bleeding. Spock sat up, giving a good impression that he was fit to leave Sickbay.

"You shouldn't be moving around yet."

"I do not wish to intrude on your privacy any more than I already have, Doctor."

"What I have to say I think you should hear. Please get back into bed."

Spock obeyed, easing his head back onto the pillows.

"Relax, Jim, I ain't gonna hurt him."

"Until it's time for the next blood sample," retorted Spock.

"Have some more coffee, Bones," said Kirk, quietly handing over the retrieved beaker.

"Thanks. How's the head?"

"Easing. Stop trying to evade the issue."

McCoy sipped his coffee and started. "You know that I trained as a doctor on Earth. When I graduated I went into the family practice with my father and grandfather. Grandpa got me interested in E.T. medicine. Not how to treat aliens, but how they practiced medicine on themselves. I started looking at E.T. medical techniques and seeing if they could be used to help treat Human ailments. It was challenging work, and rewarding, too. I enjoyed it. Gradually I built up knowledge and contacts all round the world. I wrote some papers, got myself noticed; and managed to help a few people along the way. I started getting called in for consultancy work - I even did some for Starfleet on some of the problems that they'd gathered. My 'fame' spread off-world. I was writing to doctors on a dozen worlds, swapping ideas and research. I withdrew from the family practice and went into E.T. medicine full time. I got myself a reputation.

"That's when the trouble started. An investigative journalist did a piece on me and my work, highlighting the fact that as an independent I was producing better results than most of the officially backed groups. It drew me a lot of bad comments and cold shoulders from them. I had to bend quite a few ears to get through to them that I'd had nothing to do with the piece. We'd been co-operating quietly, and this loony writer - and the not-quite-accurate slant she'd put on the way things were - had nearly put four years of contacts down the drain. I tracked her down all ready to blast her into little pieces. I fell in love instead. She was everything that I had always hoped to find in a woman. We got married. Mrs. Sarah McCoy. I was so proud. I had a really interesting job, a delightful wife, friends and a good living. What more could a man ask for?

"I thought that she was happy too. She never said she wasn't. She was her own lady, still did investigative pieces. My wife the journalist." He stopped, surrounded by the dreams of long ago, living them again.

"Your people don't have any problems with marital fidelity, do they, Spock?"

"Contrary to popular belief such things do arise, but they are mercifully rare."

"Humans do it all the time. I don't know when it started, who with, or why. About three years after we were married I started getting uneasy. I still can't put exactly why into words. Our social life was good, we still attracted each other, we had no problems with finance, and yet there was *something*. I tried to explain to Sarah. I guess I was as clumsy then as I'm being now. She laughed my fears away; and I let her. We carried on. I had some lucky breaks with some research, my reputation was solid. I thought I had it all.

"We'd been married for about eight years. Jo was just two, and absolutely adorable. The first cracks started to show. Ones that even I couldn't ignore. I was offered the chance of a professorship at an off-world university. It was a wonderful chance. Teaching, research, my own staff. When I told Sarah about it, she pitched a fit at me. Said how inconsiderate I was. How selfish, always doing what I wanted to do, never thinking about her or Jo. How I spent so much time researching in the labs that I didn't see her from one week's end to the next. Maybe some of it was true. I worked hard, but she'd known that's how it would be.

"I didn't take the offer up. Gave some feeble excuse about not wanting to move Jo from Earth while she was so young. We carried on for another two years or so, but the old spark between us was gone. I finally blew the lid off our marriage. It was entirely by accident.

"I was at a seminar, giving a lecture on some aspect of treatment or the other. One of the doctors there was a man I'd had contact with for years. He was a good ten years older than me. Roy Kenasy. Brilliant man. His university had sent him to Earth and we'd finally met up. He was doing some research for my organisation and he'd brought the results with him. It was something that he'd been working on for months, and the solution was typical of the man. Sheer genius.

"We felt like celebrating, so we did. Exclusive restaurant, good food, good booze. We got a little maudlin. Roy started talking about what he was going to do next. He asked if there was any chance of a permanent job. He said he'd met a girl while he was on Earth. How he loved her. How he'd asked her to marry him. He said he was waiting for her answer. He showed me her picture. It was Sarah.

"I sobered up so fast. Shock can do that. I got us back to the seminar and didn't say anything to him. When I got home I challenged Sarah. She tried to bluff it, but I wouldn't let it go. I got the truth out of her in the end. She'd always had lovers. Before we were married and afterwards. She'd even kept the same lover while we were engaged and visited him during our honeymoon. She said she preferred making love to inexperienced men.

"She laughed at me. She told me Jo wasn't my child, that she was the child of whoever it was she'd found that time to spend a few hours with.

"I ran. She pulled my life apart and laughed while she did it, and I ran. I couldn't believe it, I didn't want to, but I couldn't stay and listen to her. I went to my lab and got out Jo's medical records. It took hours before I was sure Jo is my daughter. I went back to get her.

"When I got back to the house Sarah had gone and she'd taken Jo with her. I started searching for her, but I couldn't find them.

There were just so many places she could have gone. I went back to the house eventually. There were messages waiting for me from all over. She'd been very busy.

"I started with the labs. The people there were in a flat panic trying to figure out why I had resigned. I explained that I hadn't, that it was my wife's way of celebrating the end of our marriage. After that I contacted the banking house. They wanted to talk to me about how they were to deal with the monies I had ordered paid during the day since I'd withdrawn all my money and closed the account. I explained again and got that settled. Then I called up my solicitor and explained what had been going on.

"He did what he could. He managed to get me free of Sarah with all my teeth intact, but that was about all I had left.

"It wasn't so much what they claimed, but how they claimed it. Nothing you could refute or deny, just damning with faint praise. Sarah had a way of twisting the most innocent of words, the most innocuous happening, into something perverted.

"The thing that hurt most was losing Jo. Sarah claimed that my extensive research commitments made it impossible for me to give her the time and attention she deserved. I fought it as hard as I could, but I couldn't get her back. I managed to get access to her, but I rarely managed to see her. Just enough to keep her remembering me. Since I joined Starfleet it's got so that she doesn't write back, but I still keep sending to her. Maybe one day...

"I had to sell everything I owned to meet the settlement Sarah arranged. I got the last laugh on her, though. She'd claimed the money to pay for Jo's schooling, so I set up an unbreakable trust fund administered by my solicitor and the court to fund all of Jo's school fees. Of course the whole thing made spectacular news, Sarah made sure of that. I had about five men call me. They'd been lovers of Sarah, but hadn't known her as Sarah. They didn't know she was married.

"I went back to work, but after a while I realised that I couldn't go on there. Every time I met anyone who had known Sarah, or looked at one of my colleagues, I wondered if they had made love to my wife. Then I heard about Roy. He blamed himself for me finding out. He had no idea. He... He... killed himself.

"That broke me loose. I couldn't stay any longer. I went to Starfleet. Not through the connections I'd made - I went to the Recruitment Centre. I don't think it's the same on Vulcan, Spock. On Earth you just join a queue and they start the screening process. The computer takes your I.D. and gives you a number, then you go through a basic test. It takes days. Mental, physical. It takes you apart. If you fail you're just given your score and shown the door. You can try as often as you like, but it's only the people who pass Basic One that get investigated as possibly good enough. I made it... just. I must have been the oldest man the reviewing officer had ever seen walk into his office. I guess I did look a bit of a wreck. I hadn't slept in three days and I needed to shave, had about a 12-day growth on my face. I looked about 10 years older than my Pa, but I'd made it without any strings being pulled, and that was the way I wanted it.

"He did me proud, that guy. Went through the whole procedure by the book. I had the courage to tell him about Sarah; they'd have found it out, of course, but it was better that I could tell him.

They let me wash and shave and sleep for a while, then they got me out of bed, fed me, and started the next set of tests. Funny, it seemed to get easier, not harder. They finally admitted that maybe, just maybe, I was worthwhile them taking some trouble over.

"The final interview was something to behold. There was me, in a cadet's uniform, and this young girl, in a Lieutenant's uniform. You could see it had got to her. We both knew I was in; it was just a matter of what I was assigned to do. She was very polite, but she didn't know what to suggest. She'd been given me to process almost as a joke by her boss. So I smiled at her and said I was professionally qualified and that I'd like to use my qualifications while I was in Starfleet. She smiled at me and asked me what my qualifications were, and I told her I was an M.D. Now, fully qualified M.D.s. are quite rare joining Starfleet through the test system; they usually get the red carpet treatment - that means preferential treatment, Spock. So she smiled a little more sweetly at me and asked me to list my qualifications.

"She had the truth meter on me, of course, so as I started listing them her smile vanished until the computer didn't interrupt me. Then she said, "Would you mind telling me your name, please, sir?" which was odd considering our respective ranks. I said, "Leonard Horatio McCoy." She looked at the truth meter and when it didn't flicker she very calmly said, "Excuse me, sir," and left the room. She was back in less than three minutes with a full Admiral. He checked on what she told him and things went into warp drive. He enlisted me then and there. I went through the ranks one a day, and walked out as a Lieutenant on a three-day pass to wind up my affairs." He smiled slowly at his choice of words.

Kirk was looking confused, but Spock had a frozen expression on his face that McCoy didn't like.

"It's okay, Spock. It'll be all right."

Kirk opened his mouth, and was forestalled by McCoy. "You've been very patient, Jim. You haven't spotted the cause, but he has. On the Shore Leave Planet, what happened to you?"

"I remembered some people I knew at the Academy. Finnegan and... Ruth?"

"I'm afraid so, Jim. It was Sarah. I've handled this very badly, but where she's concerned I always do. I was scared, Jim. I kept on remembering Roy."

"I didn't know, Bones. I swear I didn't know."

"I know that you didn't. I talked to the girl. She didn't know me, and she would have done had you known."

"You talked?" Kirk was beginning to react; guilt and anger, the emotions McCoy had feared to awake in him were taking over.

Spock moved to try to intercept and divert the gathering storm. "Captain?"

"That's enough, Spock. Yes, I can see why you had to, Doctor, and also why you didn't want to face a court martial. It would have looked very bad for all of us if you had to say that your Captain had made love to your wife."



"That is not why."

"I said *enough*, Spock. Don't attempt to interfere in what you don't understand."

The words tore into Spock. He had not expected to hear such words from Kirk and in that tone; coming so soon after McCoy's they bit deep into him. The old wounds of quiet desolation reopened.

"I will not do so again, sir. I realise now that I was totally mistaken in my conclusions that I should remain on the Enterprise. You will have my request for a transfer waiting for you at the start of the next duty shift."

He sat up cautiously and slipped his legs to the floor. Standing, he turned to face the Humans on the other side of the bed.

"If you will agree to the transfer I can beam down to the planet and wait for re-assignment there. This injury will not be noted by the crew and there will be no need to court martial Dr. McCoy. You have my word as a Vulcan that I will never mention what I have heard this night to anyone. If you will tell me what you did with my uniform, Doctor, I would like to go to my quarters and pack."

Kirk snapped out of his stunned immobility. "No, Spock, I *won't* grant your transfer request. What I just said was wrong and I ask you to forgive me."

"How can it be wrong?" asked Spock. "The same opinion has been expressed by two talented officers within less than two hours. You are both correct. I will never learn and I should never have tried."

"I was angry, Spock. I didn't realise what I was saying."

"There is a saying among Humans. 'Many a true word is spoken in jest.' I submit that the same can apply to words spoken in anger. I do not belong aboard this vessel. I intend to rectify my mistake."

"The only mistake you make is believing everything we say." McCoy edged round the bed to stand between Spock and the doorway. "The words I said earlier were spoken in fear as well as anger. I'd have hit out at anyone to try and keep my dirty little secret intact. Don't you see, Spock? I knew that you'd find out. That's why I've been so bloody-mindedly unpleasant to you for the last few weeks, to keep you at a distance and to stop you noticing that I was avoiding Jim. I know I failed and that I've hurt you, but I'm asking you to forgive me, please."

"There is nothing to forgive, Doctor. You only spoke the truth. I was too conceited, too confident to realise it. My decision stands."

Even as he spoke his legs began to give way and he pitched forwards into McCoy's waiting arms.

"What's wrong with him?" demanded Kirk, scared by the sudden collapse.

"Too little food, too little sleep and too much thinking about what's been going on around him, complicated by a heavy blow to the face, shock and the after-effects of anaesthetic. Boiled down to plain English, he's exhausted and he needs a rest, sir."

"Can he do it in his quarters?"

"Sure."

"Right, let's get him there and tuck him in before the morning shift starts prowling around."

"Then what do we do when he wakes up?"

"He'll be tucked up in his own bed, and we'll have a chance to get some sense into him. Stop arguing and give me a hand - unless you want Chris to find him like this?"

"Now don't you start!"

Kirk carried the limp figure through the corridors while McCoy roved ahead to make sure the coast was clear. They both breathed deep sighs of relief as the door of Spock's quarters closed behind them. It was the work of a few minutes to remove Spock's boots and trousers and deposit him on the bed. McCoy checked him again before tucking the covers securely around him.

"He should be out for a while yet. Can you stay with him?"

"Where are you going?"

"Back to Sickbay. There's no-one on duty there and I left that transfusion unit lying by the bed."

"Okay, I'll manage. Go, before Chris finds out."

"Shuddup, sir."

"Bones, have you entered any of this in the log?"

"Not yet."

"Then don't. Not one word, and that's an order. We'll get something sorted out, and I... We'll talk later."

"Okay, Jim."

Kirk dumped Spock's trousers and underwear and socks in the recycler unit and picked up his boots, wondering where the Vulcan usually put them and pondering a while on the neatness of Spock's quarters. His musing was interrupted by an almost inaudible sound from the bed. He discarded the boots and was kneeling beside the bed as Spock turned sleepy, puzzled eyes towards him.

"Easy now."

"Where...?"

"You're in your quarters. We moved you down here so that the crew won't see your face."

"Sensible precaution. I apologise for fainting."

"You shouldn't have stood up."

"Did I?" asked Spock wearily.

Kirk found that he had to swallow before he could answer.

"Don't you remember?"

"No, not really. I remember McCoy telling you of Ruth being Sarah, then my memory blurs."

"You aren't missing much. We agreed that we had to conceal this whole imbroglio. You were considering ways of hiding it when you decided to get out of bed," Kirk lied fluently.

"The report on the effects of Murasaki 312 has yet to be written. If McCoy will express his opinion that I need a few days rest, I could write it here."

"You can spend the time meditating in your quarters. Perfect. It won't even raise an eyebrow amongst the crew."

"Hmm?"

"Nothing, Spock. McCoy said you were to get some sleep. Is there anything you need?"

"Some water?"

"You got it."

When Kirk returned from the bathroom Spock was asleep, breathing deeply and totally relaxed under the covers. He put the glass on the shelf within reach of the bed and took the liberty of smoothing the disordered fringe back to its normal perfection.

"Goodnight, my friend. Pleasant dreams."

Kirk walked into Sickbay to find McCoy and discovered him being backed into a verbal corner by his Head Nurse, watched by an irritated audience of Herb Bind and Tamura.

"So what? I told you, I gave them permission to spend the shift in the rec room. They had callers. They can reach here in less than 90 seconds."

Christine managed to look haughtily down her nose while casting a glance at the theoretical position of Heaven. "They said that's what you had done."

"It's a great pity you didn't believe them then, isn't it?"

"It is not the usual procedure to reallocate duty shifts so freely and without consultation."

"Consultation with whom, Nurse Chapel? I would remind you that I am the Senior Medical Officer aboard."

"I know."

"Are you questioning my actions?"

"I'm just trying to find out why."

"Put it down to a combination of goodwill and insomnia."

"And the moved equipment?"

Kirk judged it time to intervene. "Trouble, Bones?"

Tamura and Bird exchanged one comprehensive glance and assumed expressions of extreme innocence. It was Christine who spoke.

"No trouble, Captain. I was just trying to find out what has been going on."

Vastly amused, Kirk managed to contain his laughter caused by the outraged expression on McCoy's face. "You're trying to find out? Is there anything going on that I don't know about, Dr. McCoy?"

"Nothing at all, Captain. It's just a minor difference of opinion."

"About what?" inquired Kirk soothingly, twinkling at McCoy.

"It was Tamura and Bird's duty shift, and I found them in the rec room when I went to get breakfast," complained Chapel.

"What's wrong with that? McCoy told me about it."

"When?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean... That is..." Chapel stuttered.

"I think I know precisely what you mean, Nurse. Dr. McCoy had already informed me of his decision to let them go to the rec room. With better than half the crew on shore leave and the rest either on duty or asleep, there was very little chance of anything untoward happening. He felt they deserved an extra break and I agreed."

Chapel had stiffened during Kirk's speech. "It is against regulations for only one person to be here in Sickbay at a time."

"We are both aware of that, Nurse Chapel. That is why I stood this watch with Dr. McCoy." Kirk took up his normal 'I am the Captain' pose, clenched fists on hips, jaw aggressively thrust forward.

Christine Chapel backed down immediately. "I'm sorry, sir, I wasn't aware."

"You weren't aware because it's no damn business of yours what decisions are made by McCoy and me that don't directly concern you, Nurse. Are you going to continue to question *our* decision?"

"No, Captain."

"I'm glad to hear it, Nurse. Now as I understand it you aren't due to be on duty for another hour and a half?"

"That's right, sir."

"Well then, I suggest you go and get your breakfast. Dismissed, Nurse Chapel."

The thoroughly confused and angry woman stormed out. Kirk turned to Tamura and Bird. "How's the amnesia?" he inquired gently.

Tamura's lips twitched as she answered, "Sporadic, Captain."

"How distressing," commented McCoy dryly.

"Not really," said Herb brightly. "You seem to forget that you get these attacks."

"That's convenient," agreed Kirk. "What do you think, Bones?"

"I think that as those two are back we might as well go get some breakfast ourselves."

"Sounds reasonable. Let's get a tray and eat in my cabin. That way we can avoid... er... entanglements in the rec room."

"That is one fine idea, Captain, Suh. After you."

When the pair had left Tamura and Bird slumped into two chairs. "Now what was *that* all about?" asked Herb plaintively.

Tamura sighed. "Looks as if there's things going on that us crew aren't supposed to be in on; and Himself and the Witch Doctor needed Sickbay and privacy for a few hours."

"So what do we do?"

"Well, I'd say we'd better keep our fool mouths shut, and we'd better give Sickbay the once-over to get rid of any evidence that's lying about that Chris is bound to look for."

They got to work and found a pool of coffee on the private ward's floor, traces of a clean-up in McCoy's office and slightly misplaced surgical instruments in the storage cabinets. They also found that half a litre of Spock's blood was missing, but rearranging the many containers concealed the fact.

"Looks as if there's been a little secret surgery going on," said Herb.

"Anything in the logs?"

"Not a word. Just the dishing out of a few headache pills for the Captain and McCoy."

"Guess they needed them."

"Yeah."

"What do you think it was?"

"None of our business."

"Yeah."

"Still..."

"Amnesia," said Tamura sadly.

"Pity," agreed Herb.

Spock huddled under the covers and clung to the tone of Kirk's parting words, repeating them again and again in his mind.

'Goodnight, my friend.'

He smiled, a gentle secret curve in the dimness. It had been worth the Machiavellian twists to ensure both Kirk's and McCoy's safety. He had recognised Kirk's friend as Sarah McCoy, and had used the Keeper's own rules about granting every wish to ensure both that Kirk had a pleasant leave and that McCoy met a version of his wife who did not know him; this in direct contrast to his own deeply hidden expectations that she would.

The problem had been in engineering the circumstances to get McCoy to tell Kirk about Sarah/Ruth. It had been essential. If Kirk had looked through McCoy's personnel file and had recognised Sarah as he had done, the outcome would have been disastrous. He had also to consider McCoy's reactions to finding out that his friend had made love to his wife. He had not even considered the possibility that Kirk had known that 'Ruth' was married. His Captain was enthusiastic in his sexual pursuits, but showed a marked and consistent set of ethics in choosing his partners. They were never crew members, or married. Single, divorced or widowed, yes; married, never.

Ferris and the vaccine had delayed his plans until tonight when Ferris had left. He admitted to himself that he had badly underestimated McCoy's reactions. Being struck had definitely not been part of his plan, but it had seemed to work out for the best. His decision to quit the Enterprise, stated in the desperate attempt to divert his Captain's anger from McCoy, had been what he considered to be the logical outcome of his original plan. He had not been able to convince himself that he would be allowed to remain aboard once he had confronted both men with the knowledge that he had identified Sarah as Ruth. Now it seemed that he would be allowed to stay. In fact - he stared at the flame-shrine's brightness - it had been shown that both men had, albeit temporarily, suspended discussion of their own problems in order to keep him aboard.

*Perhaps they do like me? Perhaps they will let me stay.* He turned slightly and saw the glass. He was still very thirsty. He reached for it, but tricked by the flicker of the flame and by vision in one eye only succeeded in knocking it to the floor.

Almost immediately McCoy appeared through the connecting door from Kirk's cabin, scolding him and fussing about, while Kirk silently handed him another glass of water.

Spock drank deeply and settled back against freshly plumped pillows. Maybe, just maybe, it was all going to work out right.

